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FRIOT FRED; or, The Tonkaway's Trust.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,
AUTHOR OF "OLD ROCKY'S BOYEES," "GIANT GEORGE," ETC., ETC.



MOWED THEIR WAY IN AND OUT OF THE MASS OF WRITHING, YELLING FIENDS.

Frio Fred;

OR,
THE TONKAWAY'S TRUST.

A Tale of the Lone Star State.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM" (MAJOR SAM S. HALL),
AUTHOR OF "CREEPING CAT," "GIANT GEORGE," "OLD
ROCKY'S BOYEEES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SAVED!

Our first scene opens amid the bottom timber of the Rio Llano, at a point midway between the confluence of that river with the Rio Colorado of Texas, and Fort Mason.

The time of which we write was a score or more years ago, when the locality mentioned was unsettled, and in the line of march of the marauding Comanches, Apaches and other fierce red-men of the Southwest; when proceeding against the settlers in the vicinity of Austin and San Antonio, who, on their return from their bloody raids, often dashed to the very guard-lines of the military stations, shooting down at their doors the settlers that had established themselves within a few hundred yards of the U. S. forts, and who deemed themselves perfectly safe from the merciless savages.

The dense, towering timber is thickly entwined by flowering vines of many varieties, and each and every limb was draped with festoons of Spanish moss, while beneath the trees were tangled thickets of luxuriant undergrowth.

The timber extends fully half a mile on either side of the river, and, at the more narrow portions of the stream, forms a dense archway of verdure, as if the noble trees had confederated in lovingly guarding the cool waters that nurtured their roots, from the burning rays of the Southern sun.

To the west of the line of timber stretches the open, flower-decked prairie, broken here and there between the Rio Llano and Rio San Saba by patches of oak openings, and at times by solitary *mottes*, of a quarter or half-acre in extent.

Directly on the bank of the river, in a natural opening, is a camp-fire burning brightly, about which are several negroes of both sexes, busied in cooking; the blaze illuminating the arched opening, for the setting sun casts no rays within the dense bottom-timber.

A half-dozen, white-tilted, heavily laden wagons are standing in the west side of the "open." But a single mule is to be seen, however, in the encampment—a beautiful, glossy black pony, with large, bright eyes, long mane, and a wavy tail that brushes the flowers and grass, as the beast impatiently whisks the flies and gnats from its sides.

At a glance one would judge that the pony was the favorite of a lady, especially as a side-saddle of fine workmanship hangs from a limb near the animal, and also from the fact that the intelligent eyes of the beast are often directed to a fair maiden, who forms one of the group which we will now inspect.

Seated upon blankets, which are spread upon the green sward upon the very bank of the river, and near to a Dearborn, are a party of three persons. One is a young girl of surpassing loveliness, of perhaps sixteen years of age. Her eyes are of a dark hazel, and most expressive; her hair is dark-brown, wavy, and hangs, girl-like, below her waist, held partially from free abandon by a tiny flowering creeper twined amid its meshes.

Her face is of Grecian mold, perfect and bewitching; her cheeks, the color of the prairie-rose when first bursting into bloom.

Of medium height, and with a form just developing into womanhood, she is indeed one that would attract and hold the attention and admiration of even one of her own sex; and that in the most aristocratic gatherings of civilized life.

A riding-habit, homespun, and of grayish tint, fitting her bust like a glove, shows the contour of her sylph-like form in every line.

About her waist is clasped an embossed belt, supporting a small silver-mounted revolver and dagger. Her small, well-formed feet are incased in morocco boots, which extend nearly to her knees. Thus she sits, gazing in wonder, as the extent and magnificence of the grand cathedral of Nature, within which she rests, is fully appreciated.

Near to her, lying at full length upon his back, and half asleep, is a lad of perhaps fourteen, and so strongly resembling the maiden that the most casual observer would at once decide that he was her brother.

A belt of arms was also clasped about the boy's waist, while a pair of rifles rested against a bush at their backs.

Beyond them was a third person, evidently their father; every cast of his features indicating this relationship. He sat with his hands clasped about his knees, and seemed to be of powerful build and great muscular strength.

He was clad in homespun, and buckled about his waist was a pair of army-size Colt's revolvers, and a huge bowie-knife; while, upon the ground near him, lay a long-barreled, heavy rifle—a muzzle-loader.

From the manner of this man it was evident that he was anxiously expecting some one, for he constantly swept the western side of the "open" with eager and flashing glances. That all three were weary from a long day's ride was apparent; and also that they had but just encamped where we find them.

As has been mentioned, it was the sunset hour,

and the bottom-timber was filled with gloom; the waters of the river rolling inky black before the trio, except in places where the light from the fires turned the rippling waters into molten gold, increasing the darkness of the shades beyond.

But the faintest zephyr stirred the drooping moss that hung in masses from the boughs, thus increasing the weirdness of the silent eve, and impressing the gazers with feelings akin to awe. Even the perspiring blacks, flitting around the fires, seemed seized with superstitious dread, as they cast furtive glances around them, and toward the group near the river-bank.

Not a word from human lips broke the semi-silence of nature. The stealthy movements of the blacks, as they glided here and there, seemed as if fearful of disturbing the weird spell.

It was a strange and most impressive scene. The white wagon-tents, the Dearborn, the pony, the negroes and the trio of whites, all revealed by the lurid flash from the camp-fires—a picture of wild beauty seldom seen, and never except in the beautiful land of which we write.

Suddenly the silence is broken by the flapping of huge wings high up in the natural dome of verdure, and a mammoth buzzard, just dropping from the sky through a clear space between the limbs, catches a view of the human beings below and at once checks its downward course, clutching at a limb and craning its neck, while its repulsive eyes were fastened upon them.

The pony bounds with a snort to the end of its lariat, with arched neck and quivering nostrils, its bright eyes fixed in wonder, while the maiden sprung to a sitting posture, and, with lips apart, gazed at the red-jowled bird. The man unclasped his hands, rapidly clutched his rifle, aroused from his dreamy musings by the strange sounds which suddenly broke the stillness. So wrapped had they all been in their own thoughts, and oppressed by fatigue, that they were for the moment speechless, all evidently being apprehensive of some possible great danger, and unable to quite decide what it might be.

Only for an instant stood they thus, when the huge buzzard darted directly between the youth and the maid toward the middle of the "open," just as a coyote—the loathsome bird's associate—ran by them, cowering and dragging its belly upon the sward, while it trembled with terror.

Catching up his rifle the boy dashed forward as his sister uttered a half-stifled scream, and crushed in the skull of the coyote with a single blow of the weapon; but, at this very moment, the voice of the man broke out, in mingled pleading and command, gasping as if life and death depended upon his words—as, indeed, they did:

"Lorine and Louis, stand in your tracks! Don't move a muscle, or you are doomed!"

Before, however, the words were half spoken both the youth and maiden had partially turned and stood gazing up into the trees that towered above them.

"Oh, dear! Oh, papa!"

These ejaculations burst from the pallid lips of the young girl at the first glance upward. Then, still as a statue she stood, her eyes fixed in horror upon a low swaying limb, upon which crouched a huge panther, clawing the bark with nervous motion, its white teeth gleaming, and its eyes blazing like coals of fire, while it prepared for its cat-like bound downward upon the beautiful maiden, his coveted human prey.

The words of the girl, addressed as Lorine, bespoke the relationship between her and the man, who, with rifle ready, stood firm in his tracks, but pale as a corpse; his eyes fixed upon the terrible beast that at any instant might spring upon his darling child and rend her limb from limb.

Thus he stood, knowing that any suspicious movement would cause the beast to spring; he having gained his weapon at the very moment that the panther crawled free from the denser foliage.

The youth also stood still as death, fully realizing the dread situation, his heart in his throat, and all his power of self-control forced to the front to withhold himself from bounding between his sister and danger—a movement that he well knew would cause the panther to spring at once.

All suppressed their breath. The negroes beyond stood horror-stricken; doubly so from not being aware of the nature of the threatened danger. A terrible moment it was to our three friends—perhaps more terrible to that father, upon whom the life of his child depended, than to the daughter herself.

Slowly, very slowly, by a hardly perceptible movement, the long rifle arose to an aim so gradual that to him who held the weapon, and who not for an instant allowed his gaze to wander from the panther, it seemed hours. He feared that he would never bring the gun to the desired elevation, yet he dared not make a movement that would draw the lightning-like gaze of the beast and hasten the moment that might deprive him of his child.

He dared not think of the possibility of failing to plant his bullet in the panther's brain—crushing down every such thought through fear of marring his aim.

Faster the ringed tail lashed the sides of the fearful beast; faster the terrible claws tore the bark, scattering fragments upon the undergrowth. Then, suddenly, the huge cat crouched backward, its eyes blazing, its back arched, its whole tremendous muscular strength gathered for the long bound down upon the angelic maiden who, chilled with horror, stood as if petrified.

At that instant a thunderous report broke the awful stillness, echoing and re-echoing through the arches of the bottom-timber, and followed by a

tearing of claws that curdled the blood in the veins of the trio. Just then the panther's form shot out from the foliage, writhing while yet in air, and fell at the very feet of the fair girl, who stood unable to move or speak, so great was her horror.

The moment that the writhing beast struck the earth, the youth, with uplifted bowie, sprung in a mad and desperate bound upon the animal, and buried his blade again and again in the vitals of the beast, all the time the deadly claws tearing up the grass and flowers in the spasms of death.

"My God! I thank thee!"

This cry came from the lips of the man who had fired the rifle; this, in soul-felt accents, as he threw down his weapon, and sprung forward, clasping the now trembling girl in his arms, while he added:

"Oh, my darling, my child! Thank Heaven, you are spared to me! You passed through the terrible ordeal like a heroine—like a true woman; better than most men!"

CHAPTER II. INTO THE DEPTHS.

So great was the reaction, from almost certain death, in a most horrible form, that Lorine, sunk trembling, without the power of speech, into the arms of her father, her gaze yet fixed, in dread horror, upon the dying panther at her feet.

Louis, the youth, sprung erect, with blood-dripping knife, and planting his foot upon the quivering beast, circled his blade in the air, crying out:

"Hurrah for us, father! We laid the monarch of the Llano low. Lorine, you had a very narrow escape!"

The blacks stood spell-bound, not daring to approach; each in the same position as when alarmed; the pony snorting with terror, and striving to break free, while the buzzard had flapped its huge wings, and soared aloft, beyond the towering trees, affrighted at the report of the rifle.

"It was terrible, indeed—a fearful strain upon upon Lorine's nerves," replied the father to his son.

"My poor child, calm yourself, for the beast is dead. I tremble to think of the consequences that would have followed, had I not rightly decided the cause of the coyote's sudden dash from the thicket. Had I not gained a favorable position with my rifle at once, the panther would, upon discovering me a moment later in the act, have sprung at once."

"It was amazing—those three sudden surprises. The appearance of the buzzard, the dash of the wolf, and the discovery of the panther, each following the other instantaneously. And it was not strange that we were all completely dumfounded."

"I was nearly asleep," said Louis; "and it was a right lively time for a few minutes, but I was quick enough to get the dead-wood on the coyote. The buzzard made me mad, disturbing our quiet camp, and the wolf got the benefit of my indignation first, the panther afterward.

"I tell you, sis, it made my scalp crawl, to see the beast's glaring eyes, and to realize that it was about to spring upon you, leaving no opening for me to defend you. It seemed hours, father, before you pulled trigger, and I wondered what caused your delay; but for my life I could not tear my gaze from the panther.

"The skin would have made a fine robe, and it would be a good idea to keep it as a memento of this dread occasion, but I've slashed it bad with my bowie, I'm afraid."

Louis spoke rapidly, and in much excitement, the young girl at length replying to her father:

"Oh, papa! I never was so frightened before. I really had no hope of escaping; for I have, as you know, witnessed the fearful work of panthers, when I have been hunting with you."

"I realized, in a moment, my great peril; but I had been so astonished and alarmed that I could not spring out into the 'open' to avoid the beast. I could not move a limb, even had you not spoken to caution me against it."

"It was providential that such was the case," returned her father; "for, had you run, the panther would have sprung instantly upon you. We must guard against such dangers in the future. Beasts of prey are numerous and bold here, not having been hunted to any great extent."

"You were so deeply wrapped in contemplation, Lorine, that I did not wish to disturb you, or I should have hurried up the negroes; for I am very hungry, besides feeling anxious in regard to Mr. Jackson."

"He ought to have reported before this time."

"Speak of his Infernal Majesty, and his appearance is assured!" cried out Louis, with a laugh, as he proceeded to cut off the claws of the panther.

Such was indeed the case, for the sound of a fast-galloping horse, and swishing of branches, were heard from the west; and soon a man mounted upon a panting horse, dashed at headlong speed from the timber, crashing through the undergrowth, and halting near the group, his features stamped with anxiety and apprehension, which, however, vanished as his eye roved around the camp.

"What, in the name of wonder, caused you to shoot, Colonel La Coste?" asked the new-comer, excitedly. "I have had a hard run, tearing through the brush; for I was greatly alarmed, knowing that we were in a locality, where you would not shoot unless in an extreme case of danger."

"You are right, Jackson," returned the colonel, pointing significantly at the dead panther. "Had I delayed firing a moment, that beast would have torn my daughter in pieces."

Jackson gave vent to her feelings, in ejaculations of surprise, and congratulated Lorine upon her escape, and the colonel on his nerve.

This last arrival was attired in buckskin leggins, and blue woolen shirt, with a sombrero, and high-topped boots, upon the heels of which were long spurs; while his belt held the usual revolvers and bowie. He was a man of strong build, bearded, and of medium hight. His skin was much bronzed by sun and camp-fire, and he was a typical Texan in appearance, although a man of fair education and excellent manners.

Jackson was the wagon-master of Colonel La Coste.

"What have you to report?" asked the colonel, as his employee dismounted. "I have been quite anxious on account of your long absence."

"I presume I have been away much longer than it seems to myself, colonel," was the reply; "and I will explain my delay."

"In the first place, I was forced to order the teamsters to drive the mules up the river, fully a quarter of a mile, and then herd the animals, as the grass was not as good directly west from this camp as further up. Then, being anxious in regard to the scouts, I galloped out over the plain some three miles, thinking I might see them returning from the San Saba; but not a glimpse of a human being did I discover."

"And what is the occasion of this delay in the return of Mr. Fred Fontaine and Old Rocky? Have you any fears of their having met danger? Do you think there are any Indians on the San Saba?"

Lorine, who had entirely recovered herself, and manifested an anxious interest in the words of Jackson, after the latter had mentioned the scouts, put these questions in a hurried manner, that betrayed her deep interest in the absent ones.

"I have no idea what has detained them, Miss La Coste," answered Jackson; "and I cannot inform you whether there are any Indians in the vicinity of the San Saba; although I have a strong suspicion that the river is not free from the red demons at this season of the year."

"The scouts will doubtless return before morning," said the colonel, in a thoughtful manner. "Did you intend to keep the herd out on the plain all night, Jackson?"

"Not by any means. We must be prudent now. I shall have the mules driven into the timber near our camp in about three hours. We must run no risk, but guard against a stampede. The red thieves would risk much to capture such a herd of fat mules."

"I presume so; but let us eat our supper, and banish all thoughts of the Comanches, or our digestion will be spoiled. Come, Lorine and Louis, I hope the panther did not spoil your appetites."

The four then proceeded toward the fires, where the negroes had spread upon a piece of canvas a feast that could not have failed to be appreciated by any hungry human; the scent of broiled turkey, venison and fish filling the air, while the aroma of Rio and Java floated about the camp.

Seated upon bundles of blankets the quartette of whites were now waited upon by the silent, but deeply impressed blacks, who cast frequent curious and solicitous glances upon Lorine, for they felt that their young mistress had been miraculously preserved from a most terrible death.

All were curious, and were, besides, filled with superstitious wonder at the strange happenings of a brief moment.

The meal was eaten in silence by all except Louis, who rattled off many comments in regard to the recent peril of his sister, as well as upon the absence of Fred Fontaine and Old Rocky, the missing scouts.

The colonel was oppressed with fears in regard to the absentees, as well as was Jackson and Lorine. This was evident by their silence, and was stamped upon their faces whenever Louis made mention of the names of the scouts.

However, all ate heartily, and then returned to their former resting-place; two of the blacks having, agreeably to orders, dragged the carcass of the panther from the camp, and spread it into the river. The blankets were now thrown on the bank, at some distance from the former position, and at a point where there could be no danger of wild beasts springing down upon them from the large branches of the trees.

Then, Lorine, having changed her riding-habit in the Dearborn, seated herself, and Louis resting his head in her lap, lay outstretched; the sister toying with the brother's curls, while her gaze wandered from the dark waters of the river to the dense shades, she, at times, shuddering as if her imaginings, were too real, and the weird somber night was pregnant with horrors more terrible than the panther.

Colonel La Coste and Jackson seated themselves near at hand, and igniting their pipes, conversed in low tones; while the negroes, after partaking of their evening meal, put things to rights, and repaired to their assigned positions about the camp, with guns in hand, to act as sentinels, the women seating themselves in a group, at a respectful distance from their master.

Thus an hour passed, Lorine declining to retire into the Dearborn, and go to sleep, saying that she felt in no way inclined to slumber.

Louis slept soundly, his head reclining upon his sister's lap, and her hands upon his curls.

The pony lay down also, curving his neck, and resting his head upon his shoulders, soon becoming oblivious to aught but equine dreams.

Colonel La Coste and Jackson conversed in low tones, frequently gazing at Lorine, who still sat upright, her eyes open, and apparently in deep thought, or greatly impressed by her surroundings.

The two former frequently swept the camp and shades with keen gaze, and held their rifles across

their knees; yet, for the time mentioned, no sound, nor sight of aught to create apprehension, or even to attract the slightest notice, was seen or heard by any in the encampment.

The fires were kept burning by the negroes, who by turns guarded the camp, and the "open" was thus kept illuminated to such a degree as to enable any object to be clearly seen within the clear space; even between the wagons and the border of under-growth on the western side of the camp.

But a change, far more sudden and startling than had been occasioned by the recent advent of buzzard, coyote, or panther, was destined to transform the feelings and positions of all parties, and create abject terror and anguish. For, but a little time had passed, when Lorine La Coste, with a piercing shriek, sprung to her feet, causing the sleeping Louis to be thrown roughly from her lap, and standing erect, with staring eyes, and form trembling from head to foot, the maiden, with quivering arm outstretched, pointed directly at the margin of the river-bank, but a short distance below their position.

Colonel La Coste and Jackson bounded upright, the click of locks sounding with steely snap, as they cocked their rifles, both following the direction pointed out by Lorine.

There, upon the bank, in a natural position, the firelight playing upon its eyes, its side covered with blood and gaping gashes, stood the panther, that all knew was dead, and not only that, but had been hurled into the river.

Only a moment stood the panther thus; not long enough for the dumfounded observers to reason—then it sunk to earth, and its disappearance was followed by the sound of a heavy splash in the river.

At the instant that the panther sunk, another piercing shriek that expressed the deepest horror and despair, followed by a pleading cry for help, which ended in another shriek of deadly terror, aroused the agonized father, Jackson, and the half-awakened Louis, and they darted forward, only to see the deathlike and despairing face of Lorine La Coste sinking beneath the black waters of the Rio Llano!

The blood congealed in their veins as, by the side of that loved face, they for an instant distinguished the hideous, paint-daubed features of a Comanche brave, contorted with exultant hate.

This was only for a moment. Then the inky waters rolled on, the ripple drowned by the wild, despairing, agonizing cries of the tortured father and brother!

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

"DOUBLE up, and dang my ole puserlanimous pergrinatin' pictur', ef hit doesn't make me 'bout es mad es a rattler in dog-days, to guide a party o' white humans plum an' brash inter red-hot hellishness!"

"Speshly, pard Fred, when that's a petty-cut in ther lay-out. Purty air a time word ter sling in 'gardin' Loreen. But what in thunderation an' dangnation air ther curnil wantin' ter skute sich a len'thy stretch toward sunset for?

"Why in ther name o' Crockett an' av'ridge common-sense can't he squat nigher ter civerize, an' not run chances o' losin' his beautiful leetle gal an' his own scalp an' outfit, sayin' nothin' o' leetle Louis, what air a slam-up kid, that's up ter all tricks an' don't skeer wo'tha a picayune?

"Mebbe so, ther curnil s'poses he knows his own biz; but I'm inclernated ter opine that he's a dang'd long way from knowin' what sort o' onhumans ther red heathun bees. He thinks he kin stan' off a war-party o' torturers with a few niggers, an' a half-dozen 'black-snake' snappers; but he'll want ter crawl inter a kiote hole when he gits his idees stomped by ther war-whoops o' bout a hundred painted perarer piruts. An' hit's comin', pard!

"I smells a peppery time ahead; but I'm dang'd ef ther scarifiers shill dance 'roun' ther leetle gal, Loreen, long es Ole Rock keeps his grip, an' kin crawl an' chaw!"

"It is very strange to me also, old pard, why Colonel LaCoste will venture beyond the Rio Llano. There are a thousand splendid locations to establish a ranch, where he need not fear of being crowded by neighbors for many years to come, if that is what he is afraid of.

"He has an idea of passing his declining years in solitude, caring to associate with none except his son and daughter; all which seems to me to be somewhat selfish and inconsiderate in him.

"Miss Lorine ought certainly not to be torn away from all association with her own sex, and should be surrounded with all that delights and makes attractive civilized life. As to the dangers ahead, none know them better than we do, and consequently we can be of use to the victims of this misguided man's selfishness, as we can with truth call it. Between you and me, and the corral-gate, however, old pard, I confess that I am sorry we ever struck the LaCoste lay-out."

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dogs! What's ther difficult' with yer o' late, pard Fred? Ef we-uns hadn't run ag'in' 'em, they'd ha' gut skulped outen ther dew, dead sure, an' nobuddy ter resky 'em. Atween me an' you, an' ther kerral-gate, I'm chuck full o' glad on 'count o' hevin' struck 'em es we-uns did.

"I declar' ter thunderation that I feels jist es though I war bein' sawed in two with a oiled rainbow when Loreen sots her purty peepers onto me; an' when she speaks d'rec'y chuk et me, I feels es though every ha'r o' my scalp war a jew's-harp, rippin' away at all kinds o' tunes.

"I alwis ormighty nervous, thinkin', mebbe so, she'll begin ter sing et me; fer, ef she did, I'm

dang'd sure I'd go plum crazy, turn inside out like a wagon-tilt struck by a norther, an' flip-flop like a bob-tailed buzzard toward ther Roarer Bow-re-Alice, es Joe Booth used ter call ther perraer-fire streaks up north'ard.

"But I plum fergut what I war goin' ter ax yer. Yer 'pears ormighty blue o' late, an' strange-like; an' I opines, pard Fred, that ther bright peepers o' Loreen hes shot plum through ther bestest part o' yer 'natermy."

The speakers were the scouts, Old Rocky and Frio Fred; both mounted upon splendid half-breed horses, marked well for speed and endurance, besides being thoroughly armed.

The first-mentioned was an old-time scout of great celebrity, small in stature, and thin in flesh; being, to the eye of a casual observer, little more than bone and muscle. His eyes were dark-blue, keen and piercing, and were continually darting glances here and there, through habit formed by a life spent amid the deadly dangers of the southwest border.

Frio Fred was young—not past three and twenty—above the medium hight, and handsome in form and face as an Apollo. He showed, in sinewy limb and broad breast, great strength; and his eagle eye roved nervously, while his supple movements were in consonance with those of his horse. Taken altogether, he was one to please the eye, and who would claim attention and admiration in any assemblage, especially from female eyes.

Attired in Mexican style, with a profusion of buttons, fringes and embroidery, and a red silk sash about his waist, Fred Fontaine would have been a striking and attractive object wherever met. His arms were like those of his comrade, but were highly ornamented in silver filagree work.

By the side of the old scout he appeared almost oppish, a dandy of the border; but one glance into his manly face and fearless eyes would banish any such thought in connection with his character.

The horses showed signs of a hard day's ride beneath the hot sun; but the timber line in their front, marking the course of the Rio San Saba promised a cool retreat, water, and rest—in fact, only a couple of miles intervened between the riders and the river.

For quite two minutes after Old Rocky had made his home-thrust question, Frio Fred remained silent, his eyes fixed upon the horn of his saddle, as if oblivious of his position, or of the words that had been uttered.

At length he looked quickly into the face of the old scout and spoke:

"Old pard, I have no secrets from you. My reasons for regretting having met Colonel La Coste and family are good ones; for, from the moment I gazed into the eyes of Lorine, when she was gathering flowers on the prairie down-country, and the stampede of mules came near trampling her into a shapeless mass—from the moment that I rode up, clutched her in my arms, and galloped with her to a point free from danger—from that moment, Old Rocky, I have been a changed man, as I well know you have realized.

"To sum it all up, and sift it out plain and square, I love Lorine La Coste better than all the world—better than life!"

"Wa-al, what of hit? Thet's jist 'bout how I put things up; but what sticks in my crap air why yer feels so dang'd pison 'bout hit. I alwis thought thet when a young pilgrim o' your age run ag'in a female 'oman what struck his fancy, thet hit made him feel extra peart, an' chuck-full o' pure glad, 'stead o' wishin' he'd never see'd her.

"Does yer s'pose Loreen feels sorter soft-soddered in ye-our direction?"

"If you mean to ask whether she loves me or not, I will say that I do not believe she knows the meaning of the word."

"Does she tumble ter yer? Does she know yer hankers arter her?"

"Most certainly not! I would not tell her for the world; and that is what bothers me. I am afraid of betraying myself when with her."

"Cos why?"

"Because it is foolish in me to think of her. The colonel is a proud man, and wealthy. He goes heavy on 'blue blood:' while I am notody, and have literally nothing."

"Thet's what's ther matter, air hit? Thet's why yer feelin' bad 'bout havin' fell in with the famby?"

"Yes, certainly; and it is reason enough, I should judge. She is not for me—I know it—but I shall never meet another that will have the power to enslave my heart as she has done."

"You know that I insisted on accompanying you on this trip, although you wished to go alone, and I own up that I did not dare stay in her presence. I could not keep away from her in camp; and if I thought now that she was in danger, I would take a bee-line for the Rio Frio, on the jump."

"Although I feel that I am slowly sinking in the quicksands of hopeless love, still I cannot leave her on this wild frontier, exposed to the deadly perils which her foolish father repudiates."

"Wa-al, I shu'd smile! Dang'd ef I doesn't hev a hefty appetite ter laugh, right squar', out an' out; an' I would ef hit warn't yeou, pard. Sich sort o' lingo makes me sick enought ter puke up my kneepans—dang'd ef hit doesn't! I never know'd yer witt on a long trail, er be short o' sand in a tough scrimmage; so don't go back on yer record, Fred!"

"I asserwates thet though Loreen air a slam-up angel, an' jist es nice es kin be perduced on this hyer ball o' dirt, yer won't be bringin' her down a single peg by hitchin' onto her. Thar ain't a better rope-slinger, er saddle-straddler o' yer age nowhar under ther sun; an' no female 'oman ever friz her peepers

on a better slapped together human in er out o' buckskin. Ye'r a man, every inch o' yer!

"Dang ther odds, whether yer hes picayunes er not, hit's all ther same, an' Ole Rock asserwates that Loreen hev gut solid sense enough ter cotton ter yer. She knows yer hes plenty o' good p'ints, an' no failin's, an' that's all that's neccessary.

"Keep right on, an' ef ther leetle gal doesn't wilt right inter her socks when yer gaze et her, an' tells her what's troublin' yer, I'll squat in a dog-town, an' take snakes fer grub ther rest o' my pilgrimage on this hyer ball o' dirt.

"But I'mbettin' she's gut a hankerin' arter yer, an' hes hed since yer skuped her up from afore ther stompede; but yer can't spect a gal o' her ederate an' fotchin' up ter slobber all over yer, an' roll up her eyes, an' sw'ar she'll blow her eye-winkers off with a smooth-bore, ef yer doesn't vow yer loves her like ther cussed fandang' skippers et San Antone, what'll borrer four bits on yer nex' minut' fer ter git some *chile-con-carne*.

"Dangnation take 'em! They rub thar war-paint off on Ole Rock's shoulder an' hev thar perlaver fer nix. I never opens my pouch, not much.

"What in thunderation an' dangnation's ther difficult wi' yer, pard Fred?"

The last portion of the old scout's remarks were unheard by Fred Fontaine, for he jerked his horse quickly to haunches, unnoticed by Old Rocky, he being in the rear of the old Texan, who, however, turned in his saddle and perceived that Fred had halted. This it was that brought forth the last exclamation of the old scout.

For an instant only did Old Rocky glance; then, guided by the fixed stare of Fred, he turned his head toward the San Saba. At the same moment the young man yelled:

"Look dead ahead, old pard! There's danger and death on the San Saba! God help the La Costes if there is a large war-party! What does it mean? It seems to be reds chasing a red!"

As he spoke, Frio Fred spurred up to the side of Old Rocky, who cried out in a frenzy of apprehension:

"Cuss my cats an' dang my dogs! Ther condemned Curmanches air chasin' ther Tonk! Spur, Fred, spur fer life! We'll save Turtle, er lose our ha'r!"

CHAPTER IV.

CONSTERNATION IN CAMP.

COLONEL LA COSTE and his son Louis, as they gave vent to their bitter anguish at the sight of the death-like face of poor Lorine, disappearing beneath the black waters, side by side with the hideous, paint-daubed head of the Comanche brave, both leaped with desperate bound into the river; but Jackson, more calm, and realizing the utter foolishness of such a proceeding, stood in his tracks, his rifle in hand, although for his life he could not decide what movement to make in this dread emergency.

Full ten feet, the two, father and son, were forced to leap before striking the water; then they sunk from view, but soon reappeared, battling the current at the point where Lorine and her savage captor had sunk from sight.

Jackson, seeing that they were splendid swimmers, and realizing that it would be useless for him to seek to influence them in the least for the present, but confident that they would soon exhaust themselves and return to the camp, turned his attention toward the wagons, from which now came cries, and moans, and lamentations—the terrified negroes, guards included, having rushed *en masse* into one of the vehicles.

Jackson perceived that not only was the camp in danger of being captured by lurking savages, but that the teamsters on the plain were liable to be attacked, and the mules stamped.

Destruction and death threatened the outfit, as well as the lives of Colonel La Coste and his family and slaves; indeed there seemed to be no other ending for the night, and the wagon-master felt that he was the only reasonable man, the only available force to contend against the Indians, who, he felt sure, were in the vicinity.

There was but one hope, and that was founded upon the possibility that the two Comanches who, by their strategy, had succeeded in getting Lorine into their power, were scouts of some war-party.

This, upon reflection, appeared reasonable, else why had not the camp been attacked at once?

Convinced that this must be the true state of the case, Jackson rushed to the wagon, and yelled to the terrified negroes:

"Hush your noise, every one of you, or you'll draw the whole Comanche nation down upon us! Jump out here, boys, and guard the camp, or I'll blow your cowardly brains out! Are you afraid of two skulking Indians that have already fled?"

"Gol a'mighty, Mars' Jackson!" spoke one of the slaves, in a trembling voice; "I see'd more'n a hundred red debils. De woods am full on 'em!"

"That's all bosh! Tumble out here, and obey orders, or the camp is lost, and you'll all be tortured. Your yells will guide the savages here, if there are any near at hand; so keep still as death—that is the only hope. Jim, kick out those fires this instant!"

Jackson soon saw that but little could be trusted to the affrighted blacks, in case of an attack. They were all trembling as with the ague. The appearance of the dead panther had been more than they could understand. Realizing this, Jackson quickly explained the situation, causing the men to crowd down somewhat their fears, and to mutter vows of revenge when the capture of their young mistress was made known to them.

The wagon-master knew, however, that this would

be but temporary; that, upon the first alarm, the terror of the negroes would return.

It was a helpless and discouraging position, but Jackson kept cool and collected, while directing the slaves, and quieting the women and children by well-selected words. He then stationed four of the blacks at different points about the wagons, with orders to remain firm at their posts, and shoot the first and every Indian they discovered; impressing upon them the fact that the lives of all depended upon them.

Upon second thought he delayed the extinguishing of the fires until these arrangements were made, and the Dearborn drawn amid the other wagons. Then he repeated his orders to the two blacks, who proceeded toward the fires to kick the fagots aside.

Tossing his rifle up into the hollow of his left arm, with a satisfied expression at having reduced the fears of the negroes, Jackson stood sweeping the surroundings of the camp for the last time, knowing that it would soon be in utter darkness. He began now to be filled with apprehension at the non-appearance of the colonel and Louis.

The two slaves, with rifles clutched, proceeded with cautious steps toward the two fires, but suddenly came to a halt, in terror and superstitious horror; for, out from a thicket, sprung the self-same panther, its sides gashed and covered with gore, and its glaring eyes reflecting the fire-light.

For about ten feet, the horrible thing glided, and then arched its back for a bound upon the blacks, who were struck dumb, and incapable of motion. It was only for an instant. Then, the startling report of Jackson's rifle awakened the forest echoes, and, with a blood-curdling death-yell, a Comanche brave sprung into the air, the panther-skin falling from his form.

The same moment that the shot rang out, the negroes whirled in their tracks to run, and piercing shrieks again sounded from the wagons; but the voice of Jackson broke through the commotion, as he yelled:

"Stand your ground, boys, or I'll blow your brains out! About face, and march up to that dead Indian, who has been masquerading in a panther-skin. Its about time to get over your foolishness, for you have got to fight now, or die!"

"I 'clar' ter de Lor', Mars' Jackson," returned one of the blacks; "hit's enough ter skeer de wool off'n our heads. Ef dey'd fight human-like, I'd stan' an' take hit."

"Oh, you'll get used to this, if you travel west much further, and don't get killed; but I'll tell you honestly, you are more liable to become a victim if you run, than if you stand firm."

The two slaves and Jackson reached the side of the dead brave, the wagon-master rolling the Indian over with his foot, and exposing the hideous paint-daubed features.

Jackson would not have ventured in the fire-light, had he not become convinced that there was no force of Indians in the thickets—the proceedings of the savages, thus far, indicating that there had been but two engaged in the strategic attempts to secure captives, and thus gain glory by their daring achievements.

"You need not kick out the fire," he now said, "for I don't think there has been more than two Indians about the camp, and here lies one of them, his last whoop sounded. Haste and quiet the women! Their noise may attract others."

Hardly had the two blacks left the side of Jackson, when the attention of the latter was drawn toward the river, by heavy groans and the splashing of water, and with rifle reloaded, he ran quickly forward, discovering to his joy, Colonel La Coste climbing up the bank, his form dripping with water, and his face the pallor of a corpse.

"Thank Heaven, you have returned alive!" said Jackson, quickly, and in a sympathetic tone of voice. "I have shot one of the red heathen. Where is Louis? And have you seen your daughter?"

The colonel drew himself upward, his eyes filled with hopeless despair, his strong frame convulsed, and stood thus, panting for breath.

Jackson waited for his employer to compose himself, meanwhile running his piercing gaze up and down the river; but naught moving caught his eye, except the inky waters, and they told no tale of what had occurred in their depths.

At last Colonel La Coste found utterance.

"My God!" he exclaimed; "this is more than I can bear. My darling child is in the power of fiendish savages, and for aught I know, my boy Louis also. For the love of Heaven, Jackson, give me some hope! Shall I ever again look upon my little Lorine, so like her dead mother? Shall I ever again see my brave boy, who dashed to the rescue like a hero?"

"Speak! For mercy's sake, speak; or else put a bullet through my brain, and end this fearful, this unendurable agony!"

"Calm yourself, colonel!" returned Jackson; "in the name of reason, calm yourself! Do not allow the negroes to witness your weakness. Erace up, and think, and work! In your present state you are of no more use than a wooden man. There are but a few Indians here now—perhaps none except the one who captured your daughter.

"Louis is a keen-sighted, brave lad, and may have discovered the red fiend, and is at this very moment following him to save his sister. I believe this is more than probable. Think of this, colonel, and cast aside your hopeless grief.

"Mourning for the loss of Lorine will not help her. We must act, and promptly, or all be massacred; for if that Comanche escapes, he will bring down a horde of his fellow-butchers upon us. Let us stir ourselves at once.

"The herd must be driven in, or the mules will be

stampeded and the teamsters slain. All depends upon your being and acting your own self, a brave man. Bend all your energies upon defense, and the recovery of your son and daughter, and hope for the best.

"If Frio Fred and Old Rocky were here I should feel safe. We must dispatch a man to the San Saba in hot haste. The negroes, with the teamsters, must defend the camp, while you and I search the bottom for sign or trace of your son and daughter. Never despair, colonel!"

From the moment that Jackson began to speak, Colonel La Coste seemed to recover himself, banishing his fears, as the wagon-master proceeded; and, when the speaker ended, the bereaved father extended his hand, raised himself to his full height, and said, with deep feeling in every accent:

"God bless you, Jackson! You have more solid sense than a dozen common men. I will follow your very reasonable advice and act, banishing my misery to all the extent in my power. Your programme must be acted upon. I will attend to the negroes.

"Order the herd to be driven in, and then put the teamsters on guard. Had you not better go for the scouts yourself? We cannot depend upon any man in the train, when close hunting after Mr. Fontaine and Old Rocky is considered.

"Life and death to us all may depend upon the early arrival of those two brave and skillful scouts!"

"Perhaps it is better that I should go," was the reply. "The herd shall be driven in immediately; then you can take Big Bill with you, and search for your children.

"By morning I hope to have the scouts here, and then the trail can be found and followed. Carry out the bill, and keep cool, colonel. I'll do my part, or die in the attempt!"

While he was speaking, Jackson busied himself equipping his horse; and as he ended he sprung into his saddle, drove spurs, and waving his sombrero, dashed across the "open," disappearing in the undergrowth westward toward the herd.

CHAPTER V.

TURTLE, THE TONKAWAY.

ABOUT two hours previous to the time that Old Rocky and Frio Fred discovered Indians dashing from the bottom-timber on the eastern side of the Rio San Saba, a horseman guided his animal slowly amid the trees on the western side of the above-mentioned river until he gained the extreme margin of the timber, at a westward bend in the stream, from which point he could command a view of the far-stretching prairie beyond.

The horse was black as ebony, with long, arching neck, and clean limbs, that proved speed, while its flashing eyes spoke of fire and endurance. Its mane and forelock were trimmed with scalps and tiny, silver ornaments, with fish-bones and feathers, while a jaw-strap served in place of a bridle.

The saddle was of Mexican make, a turtle shell serving as a horn; a gourd, blanket and lassoes being attached by buckskin strings.

The rider was a man—a nobleman by nature. This was proved by poise of form and glance of eye, although his skin was red.

He was nearly six feet in height, and straight as a forest pine. He stood erect as he dismounted, holding the slack of the jaw-strap in his hand, his keen, black eyes seeming to pierce the foliage in his front, and his sense of hearing strained to catch the slightest noise.

Naked from the waist up, he stood, his deep-fringed buckskin leggings and moccasins richly bedecked with beads, porcupine-quills, and bear-teeth. A red sash about his waist supported his leggings, while his arms were an army revolver and a long scalping-knife.

A short, stout bow and a quiver of arrows hung gracefully at his back; the quiver as well as the bow-sheath bedecked with scalps.

In his left hand he clutched a Colt's carbine, carrying a "blue whistler," or an ounce slug.

For an Indian, his features, now daubed with the paint-bars of war, were regular, if not handsome; while his gaze was open and dauntless, and free from guile or deceit.

Upon his broad, bronzed breast was drawn in different-colored pigments, an exact representation of a turtle, with head and paws extended, in imitation of energetic action.

A bronze Apollo he was, indeed, with sinewy frame, his flesh firm, and his muscles bulging out in knots; as his arms, half-bent, clutched strap and gun in a grip that, seconded by the contortions of his facial nerves and blaze of eye, seemed to hold in check a volcano of hate and revengeful fury.

Only an instant stood he thus, but during that brief space he had, without close inspection, decided the character of the sights and sounds, although yet afar off on the plain.

Hastily securing the jaw-strap to a sapling, Turtle, the Tonkaway, the friend of Sam Houston, and all true Texans, crouches low and gains a position where, parting the leaves, the open plain is clearly revealed to him.

And, although he now sees fully threescore of horsemen dashing toward him, who, he well knows, would yell with fiendish delight as they tortured him to death—who would consider him a more important captive than any white man, hating and fearing him as they do, more than even the detested Texans—though he knows all this, yet not a shadow of fear or apprehension is shown in his stoical face; naught except set teeth and eyes that flash intense fury, expressing the fiery passion that seethes in his brain and breast.

Nearer and nearer they come. Threescore of Comanches, their lances fringed with scalps, the steel points glittering in the sunlight, and feathers flaunting in the wind of their terrific speed—on, half-bent in their saddles, the wild-flowing manes of the mustangs fluttering in their hideous faces, bounding with headlong speed, while their hoofs threw the flowers and grass on all sides.

On, in a mad, savage mass, like the rush of a fierce norther, and Turtle knows that the hideous horde will pass directly by his covert toward the more straight course of the river.

The Tonkaway bounds to his feet, jerks his bow, and adjusts the string; then drawing an arrow, he inspects it, and fits the feathered shaft ready for its errand of death.

For a moment he stands, with left foot forward, his weight upon his right, and facing the point which the blood-craving fiends must pass.

His nostrils are distended at every breath, his broad breast swells, his black eyes seem to shoot out shafts of fiery hate, while his lips curl away from his white, clinched teeth.

A moment after, with the rush and trembling sound of a stampede of mustangs, on like an avalanche came the paint-daubed devils along the border of the thick undergrowth.

Just as the innermost mustangs shot past his covert, brushing against the very leaves and twigs in his front, the bow of Turtle bent until the feathered end kissed the Tonkaway's painted cheek. A twang, and the deadly shaft cut the air and was buried to the feather in the side of a burly brave, whose arm was upraised to lash his steed.

A horrible yell rung out, and with arms upthrown the doomed warrior sunk backward, falling over the hams of his horse, to be trampled by the hoofs of the fast-galloping and dumfounded horde.

Then there burst from every throat a far-sounding whoop, and the war-party came to a halt. Just then came the wild, peculiar and unmistakable war-whoop of the Tonkaway from the bottom, given in taunting exultation, and causing a score of red braves to lash their steeds in a headlong charge, crashing into the undergrowth with bows half-bent and arrows fitted to the strings.

But he who had braved almost certain death to satisfy revenge, was as cunning as he was daring, and not to be caught at a disadvantage by overwhelming numbers; for, at the instant he released his bow-string, and uttered his taunting yell, he sprung upon his sable steed, and dashed northward through the timber, emerging from it on the opposite side of the bend from the Comanches; all sounds made by him while breaking through the undergrowth being drowned by the confusion among the war-party, as they jerked their mustangs to a halt, in their amaze at hearing the death-signal from the rear, and the war-cry of the Tonkaway that so close followed it.

Heading his horse to pass around the bend toward his foes, Turtle cocked his deadly carbine, resting the weapon in the hollow of his left arm, jerked revolver and bowie to the front of his belt, ready for instant use, then gave a peculiar cry to his horse that caused the animal to shoot forward like an arrow sent from a bow; the noble beast well-knowing what his rider required of it.

It was a grand and magnificent sight. The bronzed Tonkaway chief, eagle-feathers and midnight hair flaunting in the wind, his graceful form slightly bent forward, his bright black eyes blazing with vengeful fury—the war-spirit of his tribe to the front, the war-cry of his people ready to burst from his parted lips!

On, like a catapult projectile, shot the red rider and his sable steed, swooping around the bend upon a horde of painted demons, all eager for his blood, and craving to hear his dying gasps at the torture-stake—on, to almost certain death!

No more daring act could be conceived. Reckless of life, insanely eager for revenge, for the blood of his enemies—on, like an avenging spirit, darted the fearless Tonkaway chief. And, as his sure-footed horse plunged headlong, with fierce snort at the repeated signals of its master, around the bend to the south, the war-cry of Turtle burst on the air in piercing intonations, filling the astounded ears of the Comanches, as they sat upon their steeds unable to comprehend the true position of affairs.

That a single Tonkaway, as the war-cry of the latter had indicated, had fired the fatal shot, and braved capture and death, was beyond their belief; but they were destined to have startling proof that such had been the case.

On shot the Tonkaway chief his whoop of war ringing, his black steed headed to pass southward, within twenty yards of the dazed Comanches; and, before the latter recovered themselves at beholding a single foe charging upon them, the carbine of Turtle vomits fire and lead, bursting through the massed Comanches, while howls of death, and snorts of prancing mustangs burst from the demoralized horde of braves.

A frightful whirlpool, made up of a mass of frenzied steeds and mad riders, and from which flashed and blazed a hundred fury-filled, snake-like eyes, was now before him. And, into this mass, cut and tore five deadly slugs, one after the other, in quick succession; each far-sounding report of the Tonkaway's weapon being the signal of tearing wounds, and fearful howls.

The paralyzed horde realized, when too late, the nature of the thunderbolt that shot past them; for the cloud of feathered shafts that glinted through the hot, hazy air, in the rays of the declining sun, fell short, and were welcomed by the victorious taunting war-cry of the triumphant Turtle, who skimmed over the flower-bespangled prairie, quartering toward the Rio San Saba at terrific speed,

and scorning to gaze backward at the yelling mob following him in mad pursuit.

On, and on, flew Turtle, until he reached the border of the timber. Then he jerked his steed to a halt, and turning in his saddle, gave a gesture of derision, seconded by his whoop of war, that rung back into the ears of the Comanches.

Then he shot into the screen of trees, and through the same, by winding paths, to the river. This he forded, and thence on to the border of the bot-timber on the east side of the San Saba.

Here he sprung from his faithful horse, and sweeping the eastern plain with keen gaze, uttered a single ejaculation, expressive of both surprise and anxiety.

"Waugh!"

Afar toward the Rio Llano, were two small blackish objects upon the plain, that none but the eagle eye of the Tonkaway could have distinguished as white horsemen; but Turtle could not be deceived.

"Turtle, heap big fool," he soliloquized; "Comanche hunt for Turtle. Come over San Saba. Then see my white brothers. Mebbe so Old Rocky lose scalp. Frio Fred lose scalp. Turtle lose scalp. Waugh!"

This last was said in self-condemnation. Then, as the yells of his pursuers reached his ears, he added, as he reloaded his carbine:

"Turtle sound war-cry. Lead Comanche on plain. Then white brothers see. Then no ride into timber where Comanche hide in bush. It is good."

Barely was the Tonkaway again seated in his saddle, when the crashing of the undergrowth in his rear warned him that his foes were upon him. Whirling his steed, he faced them, as by twos and threes, they broke from the thickets with vengeful and exultant yells; some of which were changed to death-howlings, as the terrible carbine again vomited fire and lead.

A moment after, Turtle sped over the plain, two score of yelling Comanches in hot pursuit; and this was the view that caught the eye of Frio Fred, and brought forth the vehement, deep-meaning exclamation of Old Rocky, which closed a previous chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

FELLOW-PRISONERS.

Poor Lorine La Coste, when she perceived the fearful-looking panther, its sides covered with the gaping gashes inflicted by Louis, and which she knew had been supposed dead, and had been thrown into the river, was filled with wonder and terror; for the Indian had so skilfully adjusted the skin, and was positioned in so natural a manner, that in the semi-darkness, it seemed to be really the horrible beast, with yet life enough remaining to do mischief.

But the shriek that Lorine uttered, upon being thus affrighted, had barely died away, when the maiden was chilled with horror at feeling herself clutched, and dragged down the river-bank; another piercing shriek breaking from her lips as, turning quickly, she saw the hideous painted face of an Indian near her own. The next moment she was in the dark depths of the Rio San Saba.

Overwhelmed with horror, the beautiful girl sunk into insensibility, and was happily unconscious during the time she was being dragged through the chill waters. This, however, was but for a flitting moment; as the cunning Comanche, clasping his palms over Lorine's mouth, darted, as quickly as the waters closed over him, directly beneath the same, and emerged, hidden by a curtain of overhanging grass, and holding the head of the senseless maiden above the surface.

Intense exultation flashed in the glittering eyes of the savage, as, peering out, he beheld Colonel La Coste and Louis swimming frantically about the river, and searching everywhere, except at the point nearest the camp, where they dreamed not, and with good reason, that the marauding Indian would linger.

The cool water revived the unfortunate Lorine, and as she gave signs of returning consciousness, the brave quickly thrust a wad of buckskin, which he drew from his belt, into her mouth, effectually gagging her. Then, holding both her wrists in the tight clutch of one hand, he easily maintained his position; standing in the water, his feet upon the more shallow bottom by the bank, his head only above the surface, while he pressed the fair girl to his side, his arm encircling her slender waist. Thus held by her captor, Lorine La Coste, with a heavy sigh, opened her eyes, and gazed around, appalled at finding herself thus, and in almost total darkness.

So benumbed was her brain by the terrible shock she had experienced at the sight of the supposed panther, and at finding herself in the clutch of a hideous Comanche, that she did not, for the moment, even realize that she was gagged.

The ripple of the river, and splashing of waters rung in her bewildered ears, and she strove to cry out; then, not only becoming conscious that she was gagged, but that a strong arm was about her, sustaining her head above the surface of the river, while her wrists were held in a vice-like grip that pained her exceedingly.

Instantly the near past flashed upon her mind, all the horrors of her position darting through her brain like a flash of light, bringing with it naught but the most hopeless despair; at the same time the poor girl's blood almost congealed in her veins, as she detected a pair of glittering eyes within a few inches of her face, and felt the fetid breath of her captor upon her cheek.

Lorine trembled like an aspen leaf, and, shuddering, tried to free herself from the repulsive embrace.

She now knew that she was in the power of the savage who had dragged her from the side of her father and brother, and down the bank into the river.

The Indian tightened his grip and hissed in her ear, causing her fresh repulsion and horror. Tortured as she now was, terror driving the blood to her heart, yet she was doomed to still greater anguish by the merciless fiend, who seemed to gloat and exult with intense satisfaction at her manifestations of alarm.

It was quite dark behind the screen of grass, but the Comanche slowly parted the drooping blades, and revealed a sight that, had Lorine not been gagged, would have brought a shriek of joy to her lips; but only a gurgling sound escaped her, and this was instantly checked by the clutch of the Indian about her throat.

The sight was most tantalizing to the wretched girl, for he saw, not thirty feet from her position, her father and brother battling frantically against the current, and plunging here and there, diving beneath the surface.

The poor maiden realized that they were searching for her, and at once understood the cunning trick of her captor, for she knew, by the play of fire-light on the trees opposite, that she was beneath the very spot where she had been reclining near her father and brother.

How long she gazed thus, ten thousand torturing thoughts tearing through her sensitive brain, the hapless girl knew not; and her anguish of mind was far beyond the power of words, be they of whatever language, to express. But, when her brother disappeared down the river, and seemingly unnoticed by her frantic father, whose search for her was extended up the stream, then all hope left poor Lorine as the "uh" of an exulting attempt broke from her captor's lips, and he clutched her preparatory to lunging forward from the cover into the river.

Then the mind of the horrified maiden was so shocked, that she became for a time dazed, and in a nearly senseless condition; during which time she was towed over the stream, into the rushes on the opposite bank.

Here the Comanche skulked for a time, knowing that the spot had been thoroughly inspected by the two whites, and watched Colonel La Coste climb up the bank into the camp.

The Indian was now filled with apprehension for his own safety; for he had heard the report of Jackson's rifle, and the death-yell of his companion. But, no sooner had the colonel dragged himself up and over the bank, than the Comanche clutched Lorine in his strong arms, and dashing into the timber, proceeded down-stream, parallel with the same; the beautiful and pallid face of the maiden resting on his shoulder, and her long hair hanging over his arm.

At times the Indian would stop, standing silent, and still listening intently; then he would gaze gloatingly upon the pale face of his captive, his own contorted with mingled hate and triumph. After this he would hasten onward.

It was during one of these halts that little Louis, who had dragged himself from the water, and cast his crippling form prone upon the bank, panting and exhausted, and on the very verge of insanity—it was at this moment that the youth detected the movement of a branch, and raising his head, discovered, to his mingled joy and relief, though not unmixed with horror and apprehension, the Comanche brave holding Lorine, limp and apparently senseless—the forms of both being plainly revealed in a patch of moonlight.

So startling, so totally unexpected was the striking, and, to him, terrible tableau, that the boy lay without power of speech or motion; and very providentially was it that his senses were thus blunted, for he had time to realize that the least outcry or scound would have caused the Indian to dash away into the thickets, and take more careful precautions, or perhaps murder Louis outright.

But the youth was as cunning as he was brave and daring, and was gifted with a sense and reason beyond his years. This he proved by remaining perfectly quiet until the Comanche again dashed on through the timber, when he sprang to his feet, and glided in pursuit; his bright eyes flashing with fury, his features filled with stern determination and daring.

His revolver was of course useless since his plunge into the river, but he clutched his bowie-knife, and stole onward, with set teeth; his eyes boring into the shades ahead, and his sense of hearing strained to catch the slightest sound, as of the breaking of a twig.

Had not Louis been so oppressed with torturing anxiety in regard to his sister, he would probably have practiced more caution, and profited by having witnessed the Indian halt now and then, to listen for sounds of pursuit.

As it was, he forgot this fact, or failed to consider it; and the cautious savage, upon again halting, and straining his keen sense of hearing, detected behind him the snapping of a dry branch—sufficient warning, under the circumstances, to cause him to dart into a thicket, and there crouch to await his expected pursuer; first, however, casting the terrified Lorine roughly to the earth.

The next moment his form bent forward, his eyes eagerly scanning in front of him, his knife clutched firmly, on came little Louis La Coste, using great care and caution, but at the same time gliding quickly, his saturated garments clinging to his slender form.

The Indian at once recognized the boy as one of the two who had plunged into the river in search of himself and his captive; and this gave the brave much satisfaction, as he felt that the other must

have given up the search and returned to the camp.

So intent was the Comanche upon watching the approach of his intended victim, and gathering his strength to bound out from the thicket, that he noticed not the slightest movement in his rear, and lost sight of the fact that his captive had not been secured, in case she should revive.

And this was a fortunate omission for those most concerned, as doubtless it was the means of saving the life of Louis, as will be shown; although it did not otherwise better the condition of our friends. The shock received by the captive, as the Indian cast her to the earth gave her great bodily pain, but served to relieve her brain to some extent; as she sprung at once to a sitting posture, and, to her intense relief, saw the Comanche some paces from her, at the same instant realizing that she was no longer in bonds.

Quickly tearing the gag from her mouth, Lorine, in great bewilderment, strove to reason as to her future proceedings and as to the cause of her captor's having left her, and being positioned as he now was, with uplifted tomahawk and bent as if ready to bound forward.

Lightning-like came the conviction that the brave was bent on murder; and, who could be his intended victim, unless it were one of those who had been searching for her in the river?

With this reasoning and conviction, she abandoned her first formed resolution to spring to her feet and bound away into the thicket, shrieking for help, and decided to do all in her power to save her father or brother—whichever it might be—who, she believed, was now approaching.

Bending her head, Lorine discovered through the foliage her brother Louis coming toward her hiding-place, as described, and her blood ran cold as she saw that the burly Comanche would without doubt send his tomahawk crashing through her darling brother's skull did she not promptly prevent it.

Without making the slightest noise, Lorine, with clinched teeth, arose to a standing posture, and stepped lightly forward, timing her movements to the moment Louis should arrive abreast of the murder-bent red-man, whose tomahawk was held projecting over his shoulder, the arm that sustained it being braced, and the muscles knotted for a terrible blow.

Lorine La Coste well knew that she could not wrest the weapon from the grasp of the Indian, but resolved to clutch it with both hands and bear down with her whole weight and strength.

At first, the poor girl trembled as if stricken with ague; but when she fully realized that the life of her brother depended upon her, she banished all else, except her determination to prevent his being murdered. But a moment or two was she thus kept in her terrible suspense, and life and death depended upon the next.

She caught a glimpse of the flowing hair in a patch of moonlight, and then, as she detected the hatchet thrust a few inches backward to give more force to the blow, Lorine grasped the weapon with both hands, and quickly jerked it toward her. At the same instant, she gave a piercing scream of warning and then shrieked out:

"Run, Louis! For God's sake, run, or you are lost!"

Totally unexpected was the strain, slight though it was to the Indian, and being from behind him and not being braced against it, he lost his balance and fell backward, losing his hold on the tomahawk, and clutching at the knife in his belt.

Horrible as Lorine felt as the savage fell nearly upon her, she sunk but to her knees; and then, with the quickness of thought, she raised the hatchet in the air and brought the blade down with all her power into the face of the Comanche, who was then in the act of rising, his features contorted with baffled fury.

The keen blade was partly buried in the face of the savage, severing the nose and crushing one eye, but the struggling wretch in his rage sprung to his feet, covered with gore, and with upraised knife, dashed at his assailant.

All this was in one flitting moment of time. The next, little Louis bounded over the bushes, and springing forward, grasped the knife-wrist of the Comanche, plunging his own blade to the hilt in the broad, paint-daubed breast. In a frenzy of fury at the act of his sister and her dread peril, Louis jerked out his bowie, and sent it crashing, with a horrible grating sound, again and again through flesh and bone, his arm nerved with double strength, as poor Lorine sunk senseless and death-like upon the gward.

With a fearful howl of death, the Comanche's strong form tottered, his eyes became fixed upward, his jaw fell, and a gurgling sound came from his throat, as the life-blood welled from his lips, and he fell with a sudden sound to the earth, by the side of the beautiful girl—dead; she, too, seemingly lifeless!

"Oh, God! spare Lorine! My brave, my darling Lorine!"

Thus cried out Louis La Coste, as he sunk to his knees, and bent over his sister, pressing his lips to hers, and chafing her delicate hands.

And there, by the side of the hideous, blood-reeking corpse of the Comanche, the brave boy wept and sobbed, until Lorine opened her eyes, sprung upward and clasped her arms around him.

Both were speechless with relief, and joy, and thankfulness, for they deemed the danger past.

But as they thus upon their knees embraced and wept, their joy and thankfulness was changed to dread and the deepest despair, for upon springing to their feet at the sounds of crashing bushes, both thinking that their father and Jackson had come, a half-dozen Comanche warriors bounded upon them

with "Ughs" of vengeful exultation from all sides.

"Father in Heaven, protect and guard us. Oh, God! hast thou forsaken us?"

Thus cried out poor, terrified Lorine from her most soul, as she was, as well as her brother Louis, bound hand and foot and hurled roughly upon the ground; the braves meanwhile uttering deep and meaning howls, as two of their number bore the mangled corpse of their comrade away through the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEMON CHASE.

"Cuss my cats an' dang my dogs! Ther condemned Comanches air chasin' ther Tonk! Spur, Fred—spur for life! We'll save Turtle's scalp, er lose our own ha'r!"

No sooner had these words left Old Rocky's lips, than both he and Frio Fred darted forward over the level plain southwestward, their former course having been toward the northwest.

Turtle had realized at once upon perceiving his white scouts, that to ward them from danger of death or capture, he must lead the Comanches on a chase at a far angle from his friends, who might thus escape notice by the infuriated savages, who were bent upon his own life.

Thus the Tonkaway placed himself in great peril to detract the observation of his foes from the whites, for he could have galloped up the river and dashed into the timber beyond the line of his pursuers, there secreting himself where it would have been impossible for them to have found him before the shades of night would aid him in making his escape to the Rio Llano.

The self-sacrifice of the noble Tonkaway, however, went for nothing, as the reader already knows; for the daring scouts turned their steeds and immediately dashed to the assistance of their red pard—his position, now, that of a single Indian pursued by a war-party of the same color; and the fleet black steed, together with a peculiarity in riding, to say nothing of a conviction that he was somewhere in the neighborhood, each and all convincing the scouts beyond doubt, as to the identity of the pursued.

Not only this; but they reasoned that the keen-eyed Tonkaway must have observed them; and, fearful of being the means of their capture, was leading his foes and theirs in a direction to, if possible, insure their safety. This filled them with admiration, and nerved them to more determined efforts to join the Tonkaway, and, at the risk of their lives, defeat the plans of the Comanches.

Full half a mile had Turtle galloped from the timber, before the keen glance of Frio Fred discovered him; the Comanches being half that distance in his rear, and the far-away reports of the Tonkaway's carbine had not been noticed, on account of the pre-occupation of Fred, consequent upon the rapid conversation of the old scout upon the most important of subjects—Fred's love for Lorine La Coste.

That the situation was most desperate and dangerous, both scouts realized; and the only hope of success in saving Turtle and themselves, was to join the Tonkaway—thus removing anxiety on both sides, and working together in common defense, trusting to escape by strategy, for they well knew they could not depend upon their horses, after a long run, as the day's ride beneath a hot sun had much fatigued the animals.

On, like a horde of fiends, swept the war-painted savages, after the detested Tonkaway, whose association with their pale-faced enemies had filled them with the deepest hatred, and longing for his blood. So eager were they, so watchful of every movement of Turtle, that they for once failed to inspect the plain, and perceived not the white riders.

Well knew the Tonkaway that, did his noble black meet with no accident, he could keep clear of his foes, as their mustangs were flecked with foam, and panting laboriously, as they had swept past his covert on the west side of the San Saba; and he felt no anxiety in regard to his own safety, his breast swelling with merited pride, as he thought of his recent exploits, which would sound in his death-chant.

But the anxiety that was deep in regard to his white pards at the start, became less as he realized that the Comanches had not betrayed, by the usual yell, their discovery of the scouts. It was, however, doubled, upon seeing that Old Rocky and Frio Fred had changed their course, and were coming, like the wind, toward him; whirling their sombreros in air, as a signal for him to join them.

This was now the only move to make, and Turtle realized, with grief, that he had gotten his friends into a tight place, by recklessly seeking revenge upon his foes for the mere sake of revenge, and not to save others from their fury, as had been his custom.

The Tonkaway delayed not a moment, but, jerking jaw-strap, guided his horse into a course directly north, almost at right angles with the pursuers, who quickly took advantage of his movement, and quartered toward him, with fearful yells, which were increased as the Indians caught a view of the two whites. The change of course of the daring Tonkaway would give the Comanches a chance to get within bow-shot distance, did he not swerve more to the east; but he scorned to avoid them, and reloading his death-dealing carbine on the run, he rode on, ready to give another exhibition of his prowess.

The opportunity soon came. The Comanches, notwithstanding the destruction they had witnessed among their own party, when Turtle, on two occasions, opened fire, galloped forward, with fierce war-

whoops, and their bows half-bent. As presented to the fast approaching scouts, the warlike scene was grand, and to them most tantalizing, from the fact that they could not reach the point in time to take a hand in the game; and as, from their position, the Comanches seemed much nearer to Turtle than they really were, both Old Rocky and Frio Fred were filled with deep concern and anxiety—the old scout rattling off "cast iron" words, and ejecting tobacco-juice spitefully, at every bound of his horse.

At length Turtle began to perceive that his life depended not only upon instant action, but unerring skill; for three of his foes were far in advance, and were making ready to send their deadly feathered shafts into his vitals.

Instantly his carbine sprung to his shoulder; but, at the same time that he pulled the trigger, an arrow shot past his head, the feathered end brushing his temple. But the brave who sent the same, as he fitted a second one to his bow-string, threw up his arms in the air, his bow gripped in the agony of death, and sunk over the hams of his mustang upon the prairie sward. His horse, with wild snorts, turned about, and dashed back to its mates, as another sounding report broke on the air, followed by another death-howl, which caused the pursuers to send a cloud of arrows at the dauntless Tonkaway, as he swept on past the point of favor to them; his taunting and exultant whoop of war torturing their ears, as did the yells of the Texans, who now gradually swerved from their course, and in a moment after were galloping by the side of Turtle, the Tonkaway—the trio, with eyes bent upon the frenzied horde who were again in fast chase, turning west to dash into the friendly cover of the timber.

This was now their only hope of safety, for the Comanches were scattered over the whole plain to their south, and all galloping furiously up the river.

"Whar, in thunderation an' dangnation, did yer skeer up the big batch o' ha'r-t'arers, Tonk?"

Thus yelled Old Rocky, as he half-cocked his carbine.

"Over San Saba," answered Turtle, pointing west.

"How many hes yer sp'iled fer futur' fightin'?"

"Mebbe so, so many," extending fingers, then closing, and again extending—indicating eight.

"How came they to discover you?" put in Fred.

"Turtle see Comanche come. Turtle hide in woods. Heap mad. Want hear death-howl. Shoot with arrow. Then jump on mustang. Shoot gun fast. Ride quick to San Saba. Comanche yell heap. Went Turtle scalp. Waugh! Comanche heap fools, squaws. Turtle show red wolves he warrior."

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dogs, ef yer doesn't do hit every time, Tonk!" jerked out Old Rocky, gazing at his Tonkaway pard with pride.

"But why didn't yer strike plum ter meet us? Didn't yer know who we-uns war?"

"Turtle know white brothers far as buzzard see dead buffalo. No want Comanche see. Mebbe so tie Fred, tie Rocky, to torture-stake. Turtle ride other way."

"Don't never do hit again, Tonk, but head right for your pards. We three hev cut our way through a bigger heap o' howlin' devils fore now."

"Heap more over river. Big war-party when at Palo Pinto. Some ride Bandera. Some ride Colorado. Some here. Mebbe so some on Llano."

"By Heavens, Turtle, don't say that, unless you are sure of it! You torture me," said Fred, quickly.

"I hopes ter be nibbled ter death by dipper ducks, an' hashed by red ants, ef yer didn't stop ther biz o' my bleed mersheen by that sort of gab, Tonk!" burst out the old scout, excitedly. "What makes yer think that's any o' ther red helljuns on ther Llano? We-uns hain't see'd no sign that-a-way."

"Why Comanches ride fast to San Saba? Turtle say they send braves to Llano. Mebbe so see train. See wheel-lodges. Then meet war-party on San Saba. Tell chief, then ride in night to Llano. Ride in white men camp, when Texans sleep."

"Wa-al, ef ther condemned, or'nary perrarerpiruts war comin' on ther hum, hit does 'pear like they 'specter ter meet some o' thar pesky advance-spies et a 'pinted time hyeraways, fer thar warn't no hurry fer 'em, ef somethin' o' thar sort warn't in thar p'ogramme. But I swan I'm hopin' hit war too brash ter show yerself, Tonk, that-a-way; an' yer'll slip up on hit some time."

"Yer'd better laid low, an' watched 'em, a blamed sight; 'speshly es yer c'u'dn't harvest thar ha'r. Ef yer'd bin nosin' roun' ther San Saba, I sh'u'd s'pose yer'd struck 'sign,' ef any o' ther smoky sons o' Satan glided past hyer, towards Llano-way."

"Turtle see trail. So many braves"—indicating twelve, by extending fingers—"go fast to Llano. Know my white brothers kill if see. Want wait, count war-party. No care follow trail of spies."

"A dozen is enough to do mischief, if they strike La Coste's camp," asserted Fred, with anxiety in voice and feature. "We must get out of this scrape, and return to the Llano, to-night, pard Rocky."

"Hit's gut ter be did," agreed the old scout: "though hit 'pears jub'ous 'bout now. I'm feelin' purty pokerish. Mebbe so thar's some o' ther red skunks layin' fer we-uns in ther timber."

"No ride in wood yet," advised the Tonkaway. "Ride up river to bend. Go in trees, hide. Dark come soon. Then go fast to Llano. My white brother's friends on Llano. Heap bad. Comanche spies they crawl in night. Get scalp, get captive for torture. No sound war-cry. Waugh! Heap bad. Comanches dogs."

"By Heavens!" exclaimed Fred Fontaine, "the more I think of it the more I fear that something is wrong in the camp. The red fiends must have been

hid in the Llano timber to-day, or we would have met them on the plain."

"Thet ain't so sartain," asserted Old Rocky. "Ther painted piruts c'u'd ha' hid in a motte ef they see'd we'-uns comin'. Thet air, ef they'd gut half-way towards ther river, I sw'ar I'm gittin' half-full o' hyderfobic indig' an' must hash red meat er bu'st. Ther yells o' ther heathun makes me bilyus."

"Tonk's advice air good. Strike up erick out o' shot from timber, an' dash in a mile from hyera-ways."

All now rode side by side, neck and neck, and speaking rapidly during this hasty consultation, the yell of the Comanches sounding close in their rear.

Their course, agreeably to the suggestion of their Indian ally, was changed, quartering up, and in the direction of the river; then, keeping out of bow-shot from the timber, they proceeded for a mile at head-long gallop, making a spurt to get as much ahead of the war-party as possible.

When at the distance mentioned all urged their horses into the timber, disappearing from the view of the infuriated Comanches, who well knew, by this time, that they had lost their advantage and that the capture of their cunning foes was now, to say the least, doubtful.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN BONDS.

THE sudden and unexpected change from freedom and security, gained by a most desperate and daring act, to captivity, with probable torture, or a fate far worse than either, was most terrible to poor Lorine La Coste.

She had, through the negligence of her first captor, become free and had removed her gag, besides being enabled to, without doubt, save the life of her brother—Louis having in turn done the same by her—and for a short time had believed that the way was open for her return to the camp and her sorrowing father, but the appearance of the savages, evidently drawn by the death-howl of their comrade, the binding of her brother and herself, so appalled and terrified the poor girl that her despair was as deathlike as possible, and yet be enabled to live through it.

Louis was horrified beyond measure, more on his sister's account, however, than his own. For he believed that his search for her had placed Lorine in a far more dangerous position than before, for but one Indian had then held her captive, and now a half-dozen braves had them at their mercy, the warriors being infuriated at the death of one of their party at the hands of himself and Lorine.

Besides this the boy had heard the report of a rifle sounding from the direction of the camp, and thought that the Indian had been killed who had masqueraded in the panther's skin to favor the one now dead in capturing Lorine. If this were so, it would incense their red captors still more.

Louis believed that the partner of the Indian, whom he had, with Lorine's help, slain, would have joined his mate, had he not been shot in the camp. In consequence of this, the reflections of the youth caused him to regret most bitterly having allowed himself to lose sight of the Indian who bore Lorine away, and who had evidently stopped to listen, and thus heard his approach. Louis was filled with self-condemnation, but repining was worse than useless.

He felt no hope of rescue by his father, as the latter could know nothing whatever of trailing, and all the blacks and teamsters would be wanted to guard the wagons—the negroes being of little use in an emergency, through their terror of the Indians.

If the scouts returned from the San Saba, whether they had gone to ascertain if any war-party of savages was in the vicinity, Louis well knew that they would use every effort to rescue himself and sister; but their return was not looked for until the following night, and who could tell what might transpire during that time?

These thoughts and conclusions flashed through the mind of the brave youth, during the time he was being bound by the hideous Comanches, and he shuddered with dread for his poor sister, as their snake-like eyes flashed glances of hatred into his, and their exultant taunts met his ear.

He could see that the braves were infuriated by frenzy as the dead warrior was borne away, and that they brandished their weapons toward the camp.

This satisfied Louis that the new-comers had discovered the wagons, or the mules on the west plain, and had followed the trail of the latter far enough to judge of the location of the camp. He also judged that the savages were aware of the inability of those in camp to attack them with any chance of success, or they would at once have hastened from the spot, knowing that the death-howl of the brave must have been heard at the wagons, and the shriek of poor Lorine as well.

However, Louis knew if these sounds had been heard, and their character rightly interpreted, that his father and Jackson would rush to the rescue, consequently he was anxious for the Indians to move on, for he felt sure that if his father followed he would be slain.

He had been nearly insane with anguish until meeting Lorine, but now he felt cool and calm; forcing himself to feel thus for her sake. It was a comfort to be near her—a captive with her—and he vowed that he would keep his wits about him, and strive in every way to free himself, and release her.

Side by side lay the captives, and Louis turned his head, and gazed into the face of his loved sister, discovering that her eyes were fixed upward upon a patch of sky, discernible through the tree-tops.

She did not appear to be conscious of her surroundings. Her eyes were glassy and unnatural in their expression, and her fair face drawn with terror, and pale as the face of a corpse.

It was agonizing to Louis to look at her.

The youth feared that his sister was dying of fright, or losing her mind, and he cried out:

"Lorine, don't despair! While there is life there is hope. For Heaven's sake, look at me—speak to me! Do you hear me, Lorine?"

Slowly the eyes of the young girl rolled in their sockets, her head turned slightly, and she gazed into the eyes of her brother. But such a gaze!

It caused the youth to feel faint and sick.

"For God's sake, sis, don't despair! What has come over you? Don't you know you are the bravest girl living, and, but a short time since, nearly killed a savage with his own tomahawk? Cheer up! Frio Fred and Old Rocky will follow these fiends and save us yet."

At the mention of the scouts the eyes of Lorine brightened into a more natural look; and, after a few spasmodic efforts, she cried out, in a gasping whisper:

"Oh, Louis! Do you think we shall be rescued? Do you believe that the scouts will return from the San Saba in time? Fred Fontaine is so good and brave, and knows so much about the Indians, he might save us."

"And he'll do it, Lorine—never you fear!" returned the boy, delighted that he had imparted some hope into his despairing sister's mind. "Fred and Old Rocky are the best trailers in Texas, and they won't stop to sleep, after they find we have been captured, until they trace the inhuman monsters up.

"If they give us a couple of days' respite, before braining or torturing us, we're all right; for the boys will brave everything before you shall come to harm. Besides, I'm not going to lie like a stick of wood, if I am tied. I'll watch keen for chances to outwit these merciless torturers, so, Lorine, do try and brace up, for they might take a notion to torture us if they saw we were weakening and likely to die on their hands."

"You are a brave little fellow, Louis," said his sister, in a more natural tone. "You have saved my life to-night, and proved yourself a man; and I rely greatly upon you in our most fearful position. But for you, I should have died of fright and despair. These Indians are most horrible—more so than I ever dreamed of. Oh! I shudder to think of our fate should we not escape from them."

"We'll get away, sis; I feel confident of it. All I ask is for you to bear it as well as you can until something turns up. If they intended killing us, they would have done so at once. They think of taking us to their village for torture, but I don't intend they shall do so—not much!"

"Here they come! Make believe you don't care for them. Don't show any more fright than you can possibly help."

While Louis and Lorine had been conversing the four Comanches had stood at the verge of the thicket, listening intently. But, as the youth announced their return, and advised his sister, the quartette of demons strode to the side of their captives; a peculiar signal having sounded near at hand, followed by the tramping of horses.

Lorine and Louis were immediately clutched by two of the braves and carried roughly from the thicket, and thence to the side of the two warriors who had borne away the dead Indian.

These braves held the jaw-straps of a number of mustangs in hand; and, after a short conference in their native tongue, the captives were seated upon mustangs, bound to the backs of the animals in haste, then the warriors all mounted, and proceeded toward the river, fording at once, and continuing on through the timber toward the western plain.

Upon the margin of the bottom-trees being reached, the captives were taken from the backs of the mustangs, and bound to two saplings, in standing positions; the mustangs being lariated to trees, where the animals could crop the long bottom-grass. This was done in a hasty manner, and then, five of the braves, in single file, strode away, heading south toward the wagon-camp; leaving one of their number to guard the two captives.

"Here is a splendid opening for us to escape," said the boy, "if I could only get my hands loose. Have they tied you very tight, Lorine? Do you suffer very much?"

"I am not secured tight enough to prevent free circulation," was the reply; "but I cannot hope to work myself free. They made sure of that before leaving me. Is there any prospect of your loosening your bonds?"

"Not that I have found out so far, sis; but I am working for escape, although I do not feel much hope in that direction, I must confess. Do you know where the braves have gone?"

"No," said Lorine; "do you?"

"I haven't the remotest idea, but I opine, as Old Rocky would say, that they proceeded at once to our camp; and I expect soon to hear the crack of Jackson's rifle, and some revolver-shots."

"Oh, Heavens! They will kill papa! Would to God we had not come to this awful border. Why, oh, why, did we not remain in our old home?"

"Don't commence to fret now. As to the camp, they are all right there; for I know Jackson would have the mules driven in, as soon as he knew the Indians were about, and among them they can defend the wagons. Indeed, I honestly believe that those five braves will never return here; and if that should be the case, I reckon one warrior won't be able to keep us in this fix very long."

At this moment, the single brave strode toward

the brother and sister, and forced wads of buckskin into their mouths, preventing further conversation. He then cast himself upon a blanket, lying at full length, his elbows on the ground, and his head sustained in his hands.

Thus he lay, gazing toward the point where his comrades had disappeared, listening intently for any sounds from that direction.

Poor Lorine, her long wavy tresses disheveled, her apparel torn and spattered with blood from the slain brave, her face pallid and haggard, bound to the sapling, gazed with anguish and deep apprehension toward her brother; presenting a picture, in the bars and arrows of the moonlight, that would have melted a heart of iron. The brave boy, beside her, strove not to be affected by her appearance, but assumed a hopeful aspect, and struggled still to free himself, although each movement gave him excruciating pain, as the cruel cords cut into his flesh.

Full half an hour passed thus. Poor Lorine's head gradually sunk forward, her long hair vailing her face, and hanging below her waist.

The sudden change, from hopeless despair to freedom and the presence of her brother, and the plunging again into the same state as at first, only increased by her loved brother's peril, and from fearing that the warriors who had hastened toward the camp would slay her father—all this avalanche of dread anguish benumbed her overtaxed brain, and she sunk into a comatoso state.

Louis suffered great mental torture, witnessing the bowed form, and realizing the state of his sister; but he was soon destined to feel nearly as despondent and despairing as Lorine, for, with a headlong rush, crashing through the undergrowth into the little "open," like fiends of the night, galloped a half-dozen more paint-daubed, hideous Comanches, who gave a whoop of exultation as they perceived the captives.

This proved to Louis that they were fully aware of the strength of his father's party, and feared them not; indicating that more of the fiends were in the vicinity.

CHAPTER IX.

A TRIUMPH.

IMMEDIATELY upon the disappearance of the trio—Turtle, Old Rocky, and Frio Fred—into the shades of the timber, a peculiar yell rung from the Comanche chief, followed by a series of signs and gestures to a number of his braves, who were near to the timber south of the bend, where our friends had entered it.

These braves quickly waved their hands, in comprehensive answer, and lashed their horses into the bottom timber, passing through the same, and crossing the river; proceeding at once to take positions at different points on the opposite side of the stream from the scouts, to make sure that their enemies did not ford it.

The main war-party, directed by the chief, stationed themselves at intervals, completely around the bend on the margin of the timber, all on foot; the mustangs being left in the care of a guard at some distance down the river. Each brave had attached the jaw-strap of his animal to the beast's fore leg, removing the loop from the jaw to the neck; thus allowing the mustangs to feed, but prevented by the strap from running.

The chief now had the hated Tonkaway and the two white scouts completely surrounded by a cordon of braves, and he felt positive that, upon closing in, the trio would be at his mercy, and could easily be captured.

Should he accomplish his object and be enabled to carry the three as captives to his village, it would be more honor—more of importance to his nation, than had he driven two thousand horses toward the Llano at the end of his war-trail; for the scouts and Turtle had sent many of his warriors on the "long dark trail," and were more feared than a score of mere ordinary enemies of the Comanches.

Consequently the chief, Rolling Thunder, was determined that our friends should not escape him, and stalked from one end of the crescent of braves on the river-bank to the other, and around the bend, giving his directions, and promising that any warrior who should effect a capture of one of the hated trio, should wear an eagle feather in his fillet, as a reward, and a sign of advancement toward the rank of a war-chief.

Notwithstanding the hundred and one daring escapes of the trio, when escape was deemed impossible, and that many braves had sounded their death-howl on each occasion—all of which was known to the Comanches—yet they were confident now that their dreaded foes were at their mercy.

But to return to our friends.

No sooner had Turtle and the scouts entered the timber, than each sprung from his saddle, and led by the Tonkaway, all proceeded toward the river, one after the other, going in a winding way around thickets, and avoiding the breaking of twigs as much as possible, although they well knew that in half an hour it would be impossible for the Comanches to follow their trail.

Before reaching the river the Tonkaway led his horse into a thicket, soon emerging into an "open," entirely surrounded by dense and thorny under-growth, impossible to penetrate, except at the point where he had entered.

Frio Fred and Old Rocky followed; the latter saying in a low voice:

"Reckon yer've bin hyer afore, Tonk? Dang'd ef this ain't a condemned cosey hole ter lay low inter! Cuss my cats, I needs a leetle rest es well es my nag!"

"Little rest we'll get for the next twenty-four hours," said Fred in a despondent tone. "Old Rock,

I shall go mad if we linger here any length of time. We are wanted on the Llano river, I am positive. I feel it in my very soul!"

"Talk no good on war-path," exclaimed Turtle quickly. "Comanche got sharp ears. Go to Llano when dark comes. Turtle say we go. Turtle's tongue is not forked. I have spoken."

By this time the bridles were slipped, hung on the horns of the saddles, and the girths loosened; then all proceeded to rub down their horses with green grass, while the animals tore the same from the sod with avidity. This done, the Tonkaway tightened his belt, and by a gesture indicated his desire for the scouts to follow him.

At the entrance to the "open" he made a halt, saying in a low tone:

"My white brothers stay here. Comanche come down trail. Kill with knife. Turtle go see what Comanche do. Turtle belt empty. Want scalp."

With these words, the Tonkaway glided from the side of the scouts, and disappeared in the thickets; Old Rocky whispering to Fred as he did so:

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs, ef ther Tonk ain't et his ole tricks! I'll bet a half-dozen 'Merikin eagles ag'in' a June-bug that he scoops in some ha'r this trip, an' gits ther persish o' every red-hellyun in ther outfit!"

"I presume he will," admitted Fred, in the same grade of whisper; "but it will take him a long time, and the lives of all at the Rio Llano may depend upon a few minutes' delay in our reaching the camp. I think it is useless for both of us to remain here. We ought to know if the way is open, should we decide to ford, and make a *détour* around the red fiends."

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!"

Old Rocky nearly s rangled in his endeavor to whisper this ejaculation, in his sudden excitement, with his mouth full of tobacco-juice; but he recovered, and continued manifesting proofs, by gesture and grotesque grimace, that a no very agreeable thought had flashed upon his mind.

"Pard Fred, we-'uns air a passal o' puserlanimous, soft-headed dang'd fools! Ther Tonk ain't no better. What yer hes jist spit out 'bout ther river sent a idee inter my brain-box that knocks me 'bout blind. We-'uns hev glided in hyer wi' our nags, an' shut ourselves plum up without a show fer nothin'. Dang hit! We can't stir in ther bush wi' ther hos-ses, without ther red scum hearin' us, an' makin' a rush ute us, whar we hain't gut any more show than a mouse in a rattler's hole.

"Ther hellyuns'll crawl inter ther bottom, all 'roun', an' lay fer ter ketch ute our locate. Ef we starts out in ther dark, they'll jump us afore we kin'ar the timber. Ther tramp o' our nags jist gives us away. Don't yer see, pard?"

"Now yer hes spoked o' hit, that's biz over ther drink fer us; but we-'uns can't skute that-a-way with our nags. Hit u'd be jist like our settin' to ter scalps our own kerbases, an' makin' a die o' hit. Cuss my cats! What war we thinkin' 'bout? We-'uns ain't scouts; we're idjuts—dang my dorgs ef we hain't!"

"I believe you are right, but it was the only thing we could do, situated as we were. But what do you propose doing, over the river?"

"Hit warn't ther only thing, by a jug full! We c'u'd ha' pinterd plum 'crost ther plain, fer ther Llano."

"Why, in the name of sense, did you not propose it, then; and not now, when it is too late? By Heavens, you are right! We should have struck for the Llano. But would our horses hold out? There is the pinching point. You forgot that, I fancy."

"Not by a dang'd sight! But I lowed ther red hellyuns' nags war sorter fresh, which war wrong, 'cos ther Tonk said they comed 'crost ther west plain, jist on ther whiz, we c'u'd keep clear on 'em. I'm dead sure; but they'd ha' lunged in on ther camp soon arter."

"Now I'm jist b'ilin' over wi' pure indig' an' hit makes me sick enough ter puke up my toe-nails, ter think we hes spilled our own gravy that-a-way. Ther Tonk air allers so hot arter ha'r that he doesn't ingineer things squar' outside o' his hankerin' ter skin skulls.

"Thar's only one way out o' this, but by the bones o' Davy Crockett, we've gut ter meander toward ther Llano ef we hes ter wade knee-deep through Curmarch' bleed!"

"Suppose you explain yourself, now you're at it," said Fred.

"We hes ter leave ther nags, glide over ther drink an' jist go hot an' heavy fer ther red scum, what I'm dead sure bees watchin' long ther river. We've gut ter jist tortur' em an' make 'em yell, jist like a thousan' wilecats, which'll draw ther heft o' ther lurkers this side over 'mong us; they thinkin' we're skutin' fer free range that-a-way."

"Arter we've gobbed a few an' gut all ther ye'l outen 'em we'll slit ther wizens an' skin ther heads, an' then come on ther lightnin' skute fer our nags. Nex' we'll make a dash through ther few what's hyeraways, an' then everlastin' whoop-er-up fer ther Llano, an' Lorine."

Fred clutched the hand of the old scout and wrung it warmly, as he said:

"Good for you, old pard! You're worth a thousand common men in an emergency. Every word you have spoken is solid sense. We were fools I'll admit, but the mistake was excusable in our excitement and worry. You propose the only way out of the scrape, that I see."

"I have been so anxious in regard to the train that I've not had my usual wits about me. I wish Turtle would return. He thinks more of a scalp, than anything else when Comanches are around, and I have always thought his intense hatred toward those of his own color very strange."

"Cuss my catamouts an' scarify my scalp, ef yer wouldn't be jist es bilyus ag'in' em ef yer war in his fix! Ther condemned Comanches stored his squaw ter death with her papoose at her breast; capturin' her when he war on a hunt, 'sides fillin' his ole dad an' marm's bestest 'natermy with arrers."

"Great Heaven! Is that so? Turtle never told me a word in regard to it."

"I reckon not. An' ef yer sh'u'd spoke o' hit yer'd wish yer hedn't, fer he'd go rarin' an' tarin' wi' hyderphobics an' skute fer Curmarch' ha'r, no matter whar he war. So take keer, pard Fred."

"I'll not mention it, then; for surely he is vengeful enough at any time, and no wonder. I'm afraid he'll be too daring yet and be taken."

"I'll risk ther Tonk, an' I'll bet he'll show up soon enough fer we-'uns ter kerry out our p'ogramme. Let's stop waggin' tongue. Let's listen, fer hit's time some o' ther scarifiers war nosin' 'roun' hyer. Lay low, pard!"

For a long time the two scouts sat, a dead silence ruling the bottom, which grew darker and darker. The noise made by the horses tearing grass was now scarcely perceptible. The intense anxiety and impatience of Fred, in a measure shared by the old scout, were at length, however, relieved by the low "waugh" of the Tonkaway, who, in whispers, revealed the state of affairs—namely, that they were surrounded by Comanches, and escape by the river was cut off, by a guard being there stationed, who could, with safety to themselves, shoot them from their horses, if they attempted to swim the stream.

Then Old Rocky explained his plan, which was received with approbation by Turtle; and, although it was a move which they did not like—thus to leave their prized steeds—they were under the necessity of doing it nevertheless.

Just after sunset, the trio made their way stealthily to the river, and down the same; the Tonkaway springing upon, and knifing the sentinel next to the bank, without creating an alarm. Then all swam the San Saba, at a point above the guards, and made their way to the rear of the line. The crisis was now close at hand.

A half-dozen braves were there stationed, Turtle having ascertained the exact position of each during his reconnaissance; and three of these must be slain, without their giving a death or danger yell—a most difficult feat, but which was duly and promptly accomplished.

After this, at a given signal, each sprung upon a particular one of the remaining braves, from the rear, with lassoes. They then bound and disarmed them, amid their terrific yells. Next, having secured them to the trunks of trees, they slashed off their scalps and ears, and otherwise mutilated them; gliding up the river again, and swimming across it, while the bottom rung with the shrieks of their victims, causing the greater number of the warriors on the east side of the stream to rush, with sounding whoops, plunge into the San Saba, and swim to the scene of commotion and combat—all believing that their three hated foes were escaping in that way.

Before the Comanches fully realized the nature of the ruse, Turtle and the Texans were galloping madly through the timber on the east side of the river; the rattle of their revolvers, and the howls that followed, proving that they had met with some opposition in their flight from their covert.

The San Saba bottom was now filled with a demoralized mass of Comanches, incapable of reason or action; and, during that time, our friends cleared the timber, and shot forward over the plain, toward the Rio Llano, where they were, at the time, anxiously looked for, not to say greatly needed.

"Dang my dorgs, an' cuss my cats! If we-'uns didn't bamboozle ther cussed scarifiers!"

Thus yelled Old Rocky, from the safe side of the San Saba.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CAMP.

AFTER the departure of Jackson, the wagon-master, to order in the herd of mules, and then to gallop at full speed to the San Saba, for the purpose of finding Old Rocky and Frio Fred, and getting them to return to the rescue of Lorine and Louis—after this, Colonel La Coste hustled about the camp, giving orders to the negroes, and putting everything in shape and order for the defense in case of an attack.

Although suffering great mental agony, the old man strove to conceal it, and to cheer up the slaves who had been greatly terrified.

Taking into consideration that the colonel felt keenly the fact that he was responsible for it all, in having brought his children and servants into danger, when warned and advised against it; his mind was most certainly in a fearful state of torture, and only by a herculean effort of will, was he able to retain command of himself, and refrain from grasping his rifle, and wildly flying through the dark woods in search of his darlings.

The herd, of some fifty mules and a dozen extra saddle-horses were soon driven in by the six teamsters, three of whom were Mexicans; Big Bill, the herd-master, and two other Texans being the only ones that the colonel believed he could depend upon. For the Greasers were greatly terrified; muttering, as they cast glances of dread into the dark shades of the timber:

"*Los Comanches! Los Diablos!*"

Certain mules, that were recognized leaders by the other animals, were secured, and the others allowed freedom; of which, however, the beasts did not take advantage, having had time to graze sufficiently, and being fatigued by the day's travel.

The herd was driven closely in, standing about the

secured animals on the border of the camp; as much to give warning of danger approaching as aught else.

When the camp was in a favorable condition, Big Bill and the two other teamsters were summoned to a consultation by the colonel; the Mexicans and the negroes being stationed as guard, at different points.

The negresses and their children, after the arrival of the herd and the teamsters, being assured that all was safe, fell into deep slumber; all huddled together in one of the wagons reserved for them on the trail.

Colonel La Coste now revealed to his men all the occurrences of the evening; but hardly had he ceased to speak—Big Bill being engaged in meditation—when a piercing shriek broke the silence of the bottom-timber, sounding from down the river, but some distance away. The shriek was followed by the fearful death-howl shot out by the Comanche, as Louis plunged his knife again and again in the breast of the brave, already so terribly wounded by Lorine.

Colonel La Coste sprung from his sitting posture to his feet, trembling and ghastly pale, as he cried out, in agonized voice:

"Oh, my God! The red fiends are murdering my child! Lorine, my darling, I come—I come!"

Unheeding the hasty remonstrances of Bill and his pards, the colonel hatless, his rifle clutched tightly, and his gray hair flying wild, sprung madly upon the first horse, he came to, dashing furiously to the river, plunging down the bank into the stream, and swimming the horse across.

Big Bill cried out, as the colonel mounted:

"Saddle up, pard! Quick es yer kin fer yer lives, an' we'll hump hit speedy arter ther boss! Thet war ther leetle gal's yell, dead sure; an' I sw'ar, ef she's hurted, I'll hash every red in ther Llano bottom!"

In less than a minute the three Texans had forded the river, and dashed in search of their employer, and to rescue his children, pointing down the stream; but the colonel was not to be seen, or heard. He, as well as the teamsters, passing to the east of the thicket, where Lorine and Louis lay bound. The braves there lay listening to their rush through the undergrowth; sounds that caught not the ears of the bound captives, dazed by the sudden change from freedom to torturing captivity.

And on galloped Colonel La Coste on the bare-backed horse; the animal rendered frantic, as the rider, by furious blows of the rifle-barrel, still plunged madly here and there; his eyes staring into every thicket, as if expecting to discover a horrible sight.

And close in pursuit, galloped the three teamsters, at intervals apart, until all knew that they had passed beyond the distance from which the shriek had been uttered. Then they came together, and spurred with increased speed, until finally they surrounded the crazed colonel, and urged him to return to the opposite side of the river.

This he agreed to do, becoming suddenly as passive as a child; big tears rolling down his cheeks, and relieving his overburdened brain. The rough Texans, themselves, were greatly impressed, and brushed their eyes with their sleeves, at the sight of this strong man in his agony of heart and soul; and the thought of what had probably happened to his children, both of whom they loved so well.

The stream was forded, and the trio proceeded more moderately, carefully examining the thickets, and passing within half bow-shot of those they were in search of, just previous to the arrival of the last half dozen savages. The whoop of the Comanches, as they discovered the captives, caused the four Texans to jerk their horses to a halt in sudden amazement; for all the Indians had joined in the whoop, which broke the silence of the night in a startling manner, and caused the whites to judge that there was a much larger number than there really was.

But they were destined to be much more startled, much more amazed; for, before they could whirl their horses to venture toward the last point of alarm, the most fearful shrieks of dread and horror rung from the camp ahead, followed by a few rifle-shots and ringing war-whoops. Then came the thundering crash of the terrified mules, stampeding toward the west plain at headlong speed; the screams of the negroes breaking continuously on the air.

The Texans sat their horses, dumfounded for a moment. Then Big Bill yelled:

"Come on, curril! Come on, boyees! Ther dang'd red piruts hes bu'sted up our hull outfit!"

Colonel La Coste spoke not a word, for he had not the power; his appearance being woeful to contemplate.

Ruin, utter ruin and despair seemed fated to be his portion for the remainder of his days upon earth.

Childless in his old age, with the consciousness that he had been the means of his own sad bereavement, wishing and praying for the death that would not come to relieve him, he sat, stolid in his misery.

Must this be his fate?

Thus he questioned himself; and settled that question by vowing, with upraised, clinched hand, that it should not be so—that, if his darlings had met their fate, he would die avenging them; that the same blood-stained hands that had slain them, should be slain by him, or slay him—he care'd little which!

Not in words was this vow made, but in thought and in spirit; his tongue and lips quivering in ineffectual attempts to form the words.

All this, as the tumult, so suggestive of massacre, sounded from the camp; and before Big Bill could recover from his amazement to shout out the words that we have recorded.

Then, like an avenging spirit, on, crashing through the undergrowth, with cocked revolver in hand, dashed the old man; his eyes blazing with fury, and a thirst for revenge, his snorting, frenzied steed flying, regardless of bush and brier, like an arrow shot from a bow, through the bottom-timber, leaving the teamsters in the rear, all convinced that their employer had lost his mind and would surely meet his death at the camp, at which they could not hope to arrive in time to be of any assistance to him.

Yet they urged their horses, by prick of bowie, at terrific speed, though having little hope that the Mexicans and negroes were alive.

But to understand matters, we must return to the camp.

After the colonel and his teamsters had left on their important mission, nothing was heard except the movements of the animals, that, pestered by insects, kept up a continuous whisking of their tails and stamping; the Mexicans and negroes, although they disobeyed orders, and collected together near the wagons, with one exception, conversed in regard to the situation in guarded mutterings; though they felt safer from attack since the Texans had ventured into the timber—believing that, if the Indians were near, the whites would immediately detect the presence of the red marauders, and that they should be warned by the sounds of conflict, near as it was to their position.

The exception referred to was a dare-devil Mexican, who, carbine in hand, took his post at the very spot where Lorine had been dragged into the river; he sitting on the bank, his legs hanging over, and keeping his eyes on the river, and the opposite bank.

The fires were kept burning, for the very good reason that it would have been quite dark in the "open" otherwise, and thus have favored the lurking savages, did the latter make an attempt to enter the camp, or to stampede the animals.

The guard, in a group, however, took the precaution to stand between two wagons, in order to avoid serving as a target for their lurking foes, should any approach. The howl and shriek proved that there were Indians at some distance, but as the Texans, guided by those sounds, had gone to investigate, those in camp felt less apprehension than previously.

Hence, Pedro, more than all others, reasoning thus quietly, puffed his corn-shuck cigarette and toyed with the lock of his carbine, his back to the camp, where, as a matter of course, no danger was to be apprehended.

However, the Mexican was luxuriating in false security, for, but little time passed when the form of a Comanche stole slowly along the limb of a tree to the left of Pedro, the eyes of the brave glittering with a thirst for blood, and perfectly panther-like in expression.

Had Pedro gazed over his shoulder upward he would have seen this warrior, and, could his eyes have pierced the foliage of the thicket at the foot of the tree, he would have discovered four more braves eagerly watching their comrade, who must remove the Mexican without causing an alarm to make a way across the "open," where the herd of mules were now principally standing and half asleep.

Without the slightest noise the brave worked his way until he reached the nearest point to the Greaser that the strength of the limb allowed, then he gathered himself like a wild beast for the spring downward, his long scalping-knife tightly clutched in his hand.

The doomed Pedro still smoked listlessly.

The moment, with the savage, for action, arrived and he shot downward, striking the Mexican on the shoulders, and sending him headlong into the river. At the same instant the Indian dived into the whirlpool formed by Pedro's plunge, and, as he arose, half-strangled and wildly beating the waters, the palm of the warrior was pressed tightly over his mouth, the glittering blade hovering but an instant in the air, and then plunged, with sickening sound, into Pedro's throat, severing the jugular vein.

As the blood spurted, mingling with the clear waters, the Comanche thrust his victim beneath the surface, and with a gurgling sound the ill-fated Mexican sank in the waters of the Rio Llano.

The brave then climbed from the river, where he was met by two others, and the trio, screened by the bank, proceeded along the same until they gained the border of timber that lined the south part of the "open," there separating to crawl in among and sever the ropes of the mules that had been secured.

This accomplished on each side of the camp, the animals, snorting and prancing, and thoroughly awakened, getting more frightened each instant. Just then the yelp of a black, a pre-arranged signal, sounded on the night air.

At the same moment the yell of the newly-arrived Indians, where Louis and Lorine were confined, rung through the arches of the bottom-timber, and a flight of arrows glinted in the firelight, wounding several of the negroes and killing one. Then came the stampede of the herd of mules.

Pandemonium followed. The Mexicans and blacks bounded into the wagons, and blazed away at their foes in an irregular manner. Two fell dead, and the remainder bounded on after the herd, leaving the amazed Greasers and blacks muttering prayers and thanks for their deliverance; while the women and children filled the air with their shrieks of terror.

But a moment after, Colonel La Coste plunged wildly into the camp on his terrified steed; but no foe was there—not a human being was in sight, except the corpses of a negro and the two Comanches.

Soon, however, the teamsters spurred their horses

into the camp, gazing in amazement at the harness thrown from the poles and trampled, and at the dead; while, out from the wagons, crawled five negroes and two Mexicans, their faces ashen, and the cries and lamentations of the women and children proving that they were certainly alive, although the tumult they created would have led one to suppose that they were all desperately wounded.

The Texans did not linger a moment, however; for Big Bill shouted:

"All right here! Come on, boyees! We must stop the stampede, or we are lost. How many reds do you find, Antonio?"

The Mexican thus addressed held up three fingers in reply.

"Whoop-er-up, boyees! We'll clean 'em!"

And away galloped the four Texans, the colonel again riding madly in the lead.

CHAPTER XI.

CHECKMATED.

THE moonlit plain, west of the Llano timber line, was destined to be the scene of startling and amazing events during the night that followed.

At the same time that the herd of mules and horses broke from the timber, and stampeded headlong over the prairie, the two scouts, Old Rocky and Frio Fred, with Jackson and the faithful Tonkaway, were within view; and, in their rear, thundered a score of Comanches in hot chase, with others in a scattering line on fagged mustangs, yet further back.

The six braves, who put in an appearance, were from down the Rio Llano, at the "open," where Louis and Lorine were bound to trees, after passing a few words with the single warrior who guarded the captives, in regard to the state of affairs, hastened immediately to join the stampeding-party; leading the mustangs of the stampeder with them, and guided by sound, which enabled them to reach their comrades, by taking a quartering course, at the point in the timber where the herd of mules broke forth.

The three warriors quickly mounted the horses that had been led to them, with ejaculations of satisfaction; and one, being of rank, immediately ordered two of the new arrivals to return, and start with the captives toward the Rio San Saba.

Then the seven Indians, in a long line, sped on, yelling like fiends of the night, and urging the affrighted mules at greater speed over the plain.

Very unfortunately, Colonel La Coste and the three teamsters did not break from the timber for a moment after the two Indians on detached service had plunged into the same; or they might have gone in chase, with awakened suspicions in regard to finding the lost ones, by thus following.

But this was not fated to be, and the Texans, with great speed, skimmed over the prairie, in hot pursuit of the seven braves who were running the animals; resolved to slay the Indians before attempting to head off the mules—a feat that would be difficult, and that would necessitate a long gallop.

But the bewildered and agonized mind of Colonel La Coste underwent a change, when he discovered that there were no captives held by the savages; that neither Louis nor Lorine were in the party. Not daring to entertain the idea that his children had been slain, he resolved to abandon the chase, and to search the Llano timber again; this time by himself.

In fact, the colonel was in a sadly demoralized state; and no wonder, as the reader must admit.

The old man had gradually, as the thoughts ruled him which led to his decision, failed to urge his horse as before, and he fell into the rear; consequently his men sped on without him, their interest in the chase preventing them from noticing his absence until too late to ask explanations; although the Texans judged correctly as to his intentions, and did not lay blame to him.

And thus, the parties in our frontier drama were positioned on the realistic stage—that is, the stampede sweeping over the plain to the west; six yelling Comanches urging the animals to frantic speed, and the three Texans in the rear of the Indians, with weapons ready, to let fly "blue whistlers" into the backs of their red foes, who were not aware of any pursuers being in their rear.

And beyond the stampede, to the west, were Old Rocky, Fred, Turtle, and Jackson, galloping upon their panting, foam-flecked steeds; having caught sight of the stampede, and filled with deep apprehension in consequence. They had been greatly agonized when, on meeting Jackson, they learned of the capture of Lorine, and the disappearance of Louis; while the hideous band of Comanches thundered in their rear, but too far distant to be the cause of any great anxiety.

The scouts, with Jackson and the Tonkaway, pointed directly for the stampede, to head the animals, to turn them in a quartering direction back toward the Rio Llano; for they discovered the teamsters in the rear of the stampeder, and endeavored to play into the hands of their friends—Big Bill and his pards.

This was accomplished most admirably, as the astonishment of the stampeder was so great on perceiving whites approaching with an Indian in their company, that, although they jerked their mustangs to a halt, they failed to hear the on-galloping teamsters in their rear, until they were startled by a far-sounding report—the three carbines of Big Bill and his pards exploding as one, at close range, each bullet finding its mark.

Three of the seven braves, with horrible howls of death, threw up their arms, and fell from their affrighted steeds, that, now riderless, galloped in among the herd of mules. For a moment the surviving reds were dazed and thunderstruck, and that

moment sealed their doom: for Big Bill and his pards were upon them with their revolvers, sending spherical messengers of death tearing through the vitals of the savages.

With yells of exultation, the teamsters now guided their horses to the north, and were soon assisting the scouts and Jackson to turn the frenzied mules. This necessitated a wide deviation to the south from the course to the camp on the Llano; which, however, was not taken advantage of by the pursuing war-party, as they knew not the location of, or anything in regard to the camp of Colonel La Coste.

On over the plain had they swept like a whirlwind, with naught but the lash of quirts, the snort of mustangs, and the rattle of arrows in the dry skin quivers; but, as they reached the point where the seven braves lay dead, and scalped by the Tonkaway, who had left his white pards to manage the stampede, for the purpose of gaining these trophies—as the Comanches came upon the mutilated slain of their advance scouts, they filled the prairie air with fiendish whoops, yells of fury, and howls for the slain; not knowing previously the cause of the report of fire-arms, which they had but faintly distinguished in the distance.

Thus was the scene changed, and most quickly: the stampede flying on the back track, driven by the scouts and teamsters, with Jackson and Turtle—seven brave, determined, and daring men—while the seven reds, who, but a few moments previous, had been hastening on the stampede, lying dead and scalpless on the prairie; while a horde of their comrades, who had arrived too late to assist in securing the valuable herd, or in saving their lives, were howling over them, and giving vent to their fury and thirst for revenge, in blood-curdling whoops of war.

And the silvery moon rolled on in the arch of blue, illuminating the savage scene, as well as others, of more interest to us; for the strange happenings, and the maddening disappointments, and catastrophes, were not destined to fall upon the Indians alone.

Thus far, during the time that the various actors mentioned had been on the plain, the whites had had the advantage in every move; their forces being joined, the herd turned, and on the way back, and the stampeder all slain. But now, a change was rung; for suddenly, the horde of Comanches, with terrific whoops of exultation, lashed their mustangs on a southeasterly course, toward the Rio Llano—the herd and drivers going directly east; their whole attention bent upon keeping the mules from turning in any other direction.

The whoops of the savages, however—the signification of which was understood by the scouts and Turtle—caused them to halt, and gaze with amazement to the north; when a sight met their view, which filled them with the most intense apprehension and anguish.

At the instant that this met the eyes of Frio Fred, he reeled in his saddle, and cried out:

"By heavens! There are Lorine and Louis! They are lost—they are lost!"

But, notwithstanding his despairing words, he drove spurs home, and shot north, as fast as his overtaxed horse could bound; Old Rocky fairly shrieking out, in his surprise and dread:

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs! That's ther leetle ones sure as shootin'!"

He then followed close after Fred, as did Turtle and Jackson; the teamsters bringing up the rear, and all lashing and spurring without mercy.

No anxiety about the camp any longer ruled the whites or the Tonkaway, and the stampeder mules were entirely forgotten for the time being.

Yet at the start there was no hope; for the horses were all badly faged, and they perceived that the mustangs, that came from the timber of the Llano, fairly flew over the plain.

Upon two of these were bound Louis and Lorine La Coste, the pale faces of each being plainly seen by their agonized friends. It was the extreme of torture—soul-racking, sickening torture—to all concerned, except the cowardly Comanches.

And none were more agonized than a single horseman, who galloped shrieking in the rear of the Indians, who were lashing the mustangs, to which the captives were bound, at headlong speed. This was none other than Colonel La Coste, who had discovered his darlings from the timber, and who was now galloping madly in pursuit.

Only three Indians were with Louis and Lorine, but these were on fresh horses, and sped like the wind to join the war-party with their captives, yells of exultation shooting from their lips, and cries of taunting, as they gazed in their rear at the pursuing colonel.

But the old man had procured a fresh horse, that had been caught in the bottom by the drag-rope flying around a sapling trunk during the stampede, and he spurred the animal on with his bowie, in a state bordering upon madness, feeling that his brain would burst, and his heart crawl up into his throat and stifle him, did he not save his children.

And all this his friends saw; and all realized that it was among the impossibilities for them to hope to reach the unfortunate youth and maiden before they were swallowed up by the thundering horde from the Rio San Saba. But, for all that, they plunged onward, although they well knew that they were killing their already overtaxed animals.

And Colonel La Coste gained upon them rapidly, for he had secured a remarkably fleet animal, and the frantic man jerked his revolver as he drew near poor Lorine and Louis—they turning their heads, their features drawn in an agony of apprehension and terror, gazing back at their father, and then at the scouts, and realizing that, notwithstanding the

grand efforts which they and the Tonkaway were putting forth to rescue them, they were doomed.

At length the hindmost of the three braves, who were in charge of the captives, halted, with bow half-bent and arrow fitted to the string, and the next instant sent his feathered shaft through the air in his rear.

The colonel fell from his horse to the prairie, as if shot through the brain, and both Louis and Lorine uttered piercing cries of anguish, the latter sinking forward senseless, and her hair mingling with the mane of the mustang to which she was bound.

Frio Fred grew faint and sick; and his brain seemed like molten lead, as he saw a brave dart forward, and sustain his darling, holding up her fair head by the hair with his murder-cursed hands—all the whites giving vengeful yells, when they saw the colonel fall from his steed, as the believed dead.

But a few yards intervened, at this time, between the war-party and the captives; and Fred, rendered frantic, struck his bowie-knife into the hams of his wearied horse.

With a cry, that was almost human, the poor beast sprung into the air, and fell prone upon the prairie; the blood gushing from its mouth and nostrils, Fred himself being hurled senseless to the earth.

At the same moment, Louis and Lorine were surrounded by the Apache horde which turned *en masse*, and hastened headlong, on the back track, toward the San Saba.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs! Somebuddy knock my brains out, an' feed me carkidge ter catfish! This hyer big ball o' dirt air flip-flopped ther wrong way."

Thus yelled the old scout, as he jerked his horse to a halt, gazing alternately at Colonel La Coste's body in the distance, the stunned Frio Fred, who lay near his dead steed, and the galloping war-party.

Then he added, as he ejected a squirt of tobacco juice:

"I'm sick enough ter puke up my knee-pans!"

CHAPTER XII.

PLANNING A RESCUE.

UNDER the circumstances, taking the general character of his mode of expression into consideration, it was not strange that Old Rocky made use of the language with which our last chapter closes; and the outcries of Jackson, Big Bill and his pards, indicated little less astonishment and hopelessness, as they joined the old scout, all sitting upon their panting horses, and gazing after the fast-flying Comanche horde, with Louis and Lorine in their midst.

Of all the actors in this savage, warlike scene, who were on the cause of right, none seemed to have their wits about them, except Turtle the Tonkaway, who, with a "Waugh!" that expressed much of disgust and anxiety, sprung from his black steed, at the spot where Frio Fred lay, and poured water from his gourd over the face, and between the lips of the young scout, who soon sat up on the sward, in a bewildered manner; his temple, bruised, swollen and bleeding, from an ugly blow, received when he was thrown from his horse, by his carbine, which he held in his hand, striking his head as he was hurled to the earth.

A portion of the war-party had halted at the point where the seven braves lay dead; and, grasping the corpses, they drew the same up before them in their saddles, joining the main party, who had charge of the captives, with their hideous burden; thus adding to the appalling look of the situation, although Louis and Lorine were now, providentially senseless, as the observers well knew.

Big Bill hastened, with his pards, to ascertain the condition of the colonel, who, it was found, had been struck by the arrow on the side of his head; the same making a ragged furrow in his scalp, and stunning him.

The Texans had soon the satisfaction of seeing their employer open his eyes; he, as well as Frio Fred, being unable to comprehend the near past.

But neither of them remained long in this state. The surroundings, and the sight of the fast-moving horde of Comanches dashing back toward the San Saba, bringing all the dread truths to their mind; and it is probable that no other two men on earth suffered greater mental agony, as they realized that Louis and Lorine were being borne afar over the plain, toward the haunts of the wild tribes, by the merciless Comanches.

The colonel was assisted to where Fred stood, all collecting at that point, and Old Rocky breaking out, in the style of a leading spirit:

"Cuss my catamounts! Ef this ain't bilyus, boyees—dangation bilyus—but that ain't no use standin' hyer gapin' at ther last eend o' ther cirkus. Es ter whoopin' up on ther whiz, an' lungin' arter ther condemned scarifiers, hit can't be did, ownin' to our critters bein' slimsy es wet buckskin. Ef we'd ha' hed fresh stock under us, we'd reskied ther leetle ones."

"Don't look so dang'd down in ther mouth, curril; but brace up, an' we'll git up an' git fer camp, fixin' fer fun, an' then skute on ther fly fer ther San Saba."

"Oh, my God! Hast thou forsaken me?"

Thus cried out Colonel La Coste, from his inmost soul, his eyes fixed, and staring upon the fast disappearing horde of merciless red fiends, who bore away with them all that he loved on earth.

As for Frio Fred, doubtless he would, in his frenzy, have sprung upon his horse, and dashed in pursuit of the Indians, braving almost certain death to rescue Lorine and Louis, were it not that his horse lay dead upon the plain.

The little time which had forced, from various

causes, all to reason on the situation, only prevented a disastrous dash to certain death, without order, or plan of action; and, from thus reasoning, all were forced to accept the advice or orders of Old Rocky, and proceed at once to the camp on the Rio Llano.

As some of the horses, from which the Indians had been shot, were wandering on the prairie, one was now lassoed for Fred, and the colonel's caught also; then all proceeded toward the Llano, discovering that the stampeded herd had made a halt on the borders of the timber, the animals being now quietly feeding.

Old Rocky, as the party had covered half the distance, cried out to his pard:

"Fred, ther Tonk hev got some sort o' fresh idee inter his kerbase, ter sarcumvent ther condemned kiotes—I'm takin' my afferdavy on hit! 'Cos why? Ther he air, jist shootin' inter ther timber like sixty."

And such was the case; Turtle having, without a word of explanation, galloped ahead alone.

"Jumpin' Jericho! Ther Mexicans er ther niggers 'll shoot him, dead sure!"

Thus exclaimed Big Bill, as he drove spurs, and galloped in haste, to prevent injury to the Tonkaway.

"Dang'd ef Bill ain't kerrect!" answered the old scout, with some concern. "They'll think ther Tonk air a Comanch, ther blamed idiots!

"Howsomever"—more relieved—"they shoots so ormighty wild, bein' so scarey o' ther reds, that they might pop away, ther hull caboodle on 'em, an' not harm a ha'r."

A somewhat disconnected account of the occurrences at the camp after his departure was gained, from the colonel, by Jackson; both Old Rocky and Frio Fred listening eagerly in regard to the search for Louis and Lorine, the shooting of the Comanches in the camp receiving due attention from the scouts. Old Rocky gave his opinion of the matters, after a short deliberation, and tearing off a fresh quid of "nigger-head."

"Boyees, things hev bin mixed up in a cur'ous sort o' way. Ef Fred hed stopped ahind, ther hull biz o' ther reds 'ud ha' bin bu'sted, an' ther leetle ones 'ud be hunk, 'stid o' in a tight box."

These words added fresh misery to the young scout's mind; not so intended, however, by his old pard, who proceeded, after a vigorous squirt of tobacco-juice over his horse's ears:

"Thar's one dang'd sure thing, an' thet air, ther condemned scum'll skute back hyer, arter bleed, ha'r, an' mules. Ef thar nags hedn't bin in a fagged fix, they'd kep' on, an' stud a good show ter wiped we'-uns out slick an' clean, while we war scattered-like; an' then scooped in ther hull camp outfit. Ther corpuses on ther perrarer, made 'em red-hot; an' ef hit hedn't bin fer seein' ther captives, ther hull batch on 'em 'ud ha' lit down on us. Hit 'ud ha' bin 'Good-by, John,' then, fer ther hull on us!"

"They'll strike ter ther San Saba, dance an' howl over ther corpuses, an' rest ther nags; then ther heft on 'em 'll strike back hyer chuck-full o' hydrophobic, eager fer bleed. They'll leave some wi' Louis and Loreen in a sly place, layin' low fer that comin' back. Then they'll meander towards ther head o' the Brazos.

"Hit war dang'd strange how we'-uns didn't strike no sign on ther Llano that 'ud gi'n us a' idee that reds were sneakin' roun'. They played a purty unan' wored out old game on ther curnil, which they wouldn't ha' tried on, 'ceptin' they knowed, by 'zaminin' ther outfit he war fresh.

"I sh'u'd jist laugh my errigatin' ditch sore ter see 'em play a panther-skin game on me, er Fred. That's why all 'ud ha' gone hunk, ef yer'd stopped ahind, pard."

"For Heaven's sake, don't cause me to feel more misery than I am burdened with now, pard Rock," pleaded Frio Fred, in a tone that proved how deeply he suffered.

"It was to be, and there is an end of it. The thoughts of what Louis and Lorine are now suffering nearly drive me mad. I must have a horse that is of good bottom and speed, at once; for I will not sleep until the colonel's children are free, or I sleep the sleep of death. Every moment of this suspense is agonizing. Their fate is too terrible to think of."

Colonel La Coste reined his horse nearer to that of the speaker, and clasped his hand with a warm and thankful grasp; but he could not speak for emotion, the tears running down his cheeks. The overwhelming numbers of the savages had plunged him again into hopeless despair.

The old scout witnessed this act, but quickly turned his head; a moisture in his own eyes, that his voice and manner gave the lie to.

"Thar ain't no use in bein' womanish 'bout this hyer thing, curnil; fer hit only bothers an' hinders ther smooth runnin' o' what's gut ter be did. Hit's plain sailin', fur es I kin see. Thar ain't enough on us ter go in brash, an' rake things; an' ef thar war, thar wouldn't be so much show ter git ther leetle ones out, wi' no skin broke. Ther Tonk, an' Fred, an' this hyer ole raw-hide ripper kin play our sly games on the painted piruts, es we hes many a time afore. Hit 'ud be ther bestest 'rangement fer yeou ter stay wi' ther wagons, niggers, an' Greasers, 'long o' Big Bill an' his two pard's."

"Yer'll hev ter move camp up toward Fort Mason er mebbe so ther'll be a hefty 'nough crowd o' scariers run in on yer ter scoop yer in. Then we'd be in 'bout es bad a fix es afore, even if we did whiz back wi' Louis an' ther leetle gal."

"Don't ask that of me, my old friend," returned the colonel, in a feeble voice, which, however, grew stronger as he continued; "I shall go and fight like a demon to get back my darlings. What is the

train, or the slaves, or even my own life, when put in the scale with their safety? They are in the most deadly peril. The savages may murder them at any moment, and you cannot, by anything you may say, change this belief, or my purpose.

"I shall go, as soon as I can get a fresh mount, even though I should go alone."

"That's just what I s'posed yer'd spoke," said Old Rocky; "an' I can't say a word ag'in' hit. But ef yer goes wi' we'-uns yer hes ter do as we sez, er yer'll spill yer gravy, an' ther leetle ones'll be tortur'd, sides all on us bein' scoped in. I hes sed that hit's gut ter be worked under the bush, by sly scoutin'."

"We'-uns must sarcumvent the red hellions some sort o' way; fer thar ain't no show ter win by lungin' in brash on sich a hefty war-party."

"Why, they'd jab ther stickers inter ther leetle ones fust pop, ef they even see'd that we'-uns war makin' a lunge inter thar camp."

"I am willing to act under your orders, Old Rocky, to be sure," agreed Colonel La Coste; "but, for Heaven's sake, don't speak of the red fiends murding my children! I know that you and Fred, and your friend Turtle, whose brave deeds are known near and far, are experienced in the ways and habits of these monsters; and I know nothing about them, except what I have to-night learned by the most anguishing experience."

"You have asserted confidently that the Comanches will not kill or torture my darling ones before reaching their village; and this fact relieves me greatly, as it leaves hope of rescue before that time. Should they, or a portion of them, return to the Llano, and be defeated in their plans to capture the train and herd, would they not become infuriated, and in this state, when they went back to the San Saba, have the captives both tortured, as a balm for their disappointment, and to assuage their fury?

"I cannot help thinking that it would be so, and this is my great fear now. But, you, my friends, know them, and perhaps can satisfy my great dread on that point."

"We'll resky Louis an' Loreen afore ther condemned ha'r-t'arers gits back ter ther San Saba, er I'll chaw b'iled owls fer grub ther nex' six moons! So jist sot that down in yer mem'rander book. When Turtle, an' me, an' Fred goes fer heavy biz on ther jump, things hez gut ter squirm an' wilt, I kin tell yer; an' don't yer disremember hit!"

"Dang my dorgs, ef we'-uns ain't gut inter camp, an' I bain't sorry, I swa'r! Cuss my cats! What did I tell yer?

"Jist gaze et our Tonk! Somebuddy choke me right smart, er I shill laugh, even when I feels es though I war bound to plant my hull famby an' distant bleed relations, cats an' dorgs counted in! Ef that ain't a purty sight, I'll swaller a catfish, tail fust, an' without cuttin' off horns—"

When Old Rocky first began to speak, the colonel had quickly jerked his revolver, cocked the weapon, and would have fired directly over his horse's head. Had not Frio Fred spurred up, and clutched the old man's arm in a vice-like grip; saying, in a low voice, not interrupting his old pard:

"Hold, Colonel La Coste! For Heaven's sake, don't shoot! That's Turtle, the Tonkaway!"

Just ahead of them, and approaching, mounted upon one of the Comanche horses, equipped in the same manner as when ridden by its slain master, was Turtle, attired in the costume and weapons taken from the corpse of one of the Indians slain in the camp. His turtle *totem* was covered by a breast-plate, and the war stripes of his foes were daubed upon his features.

So well arranged was his disguise, that the colonel had attempted to shoot him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON TO THE SAN SABA!

"WHAT sort of a idee's gut crawlin' roun' under ther ruts o' yer ha'r now, Tonk?" asked the old scout, as Turtle, seated on the wild-eyed Comanche mustang, rigged and painted exactly in imitation of its former rider, now slain, presented himself to their view.

"Yer doesn't mean ter sashay toward ther San Saba an' lunge inter ther camp o' ther red hellions, es things 'pears ter p'int, does yer?"

"Turtle ride to Comanche camp," asserted the Tonkaway. "Save young white brave. Save Lily-Face. Comanche no kill like Dove-Eye, Turtle's squaw."

The eyes of the Tonkaway blazed like those of an infuriated panther as he thus spoke; but his stoical face exhibited no emotion otherwise.

Old Rocky had not heard his red pard mention the tragical fate of his squaw for a year and more, and he now knew that the Tonkaway was in a vengeful mood that would brook no dictation or even advice. Consequently he guarded his next words to his Indian comrade.

"Can't yer wait awhile fer we'-uns, Tonk? We'll jump fresh stock an' skute quick es we kin, an' I swar we need yer now, ef any time."

"I'll gi'n in that I'm worrytated a hefty sight 'gards yer goin', fer they'll find out yer ain't simonpure Curmanch, an' they'll tortur' yer. This hyer thing 'll end in our hevin' a bigger job on our paws than gittin' Louis an' Loreen outen thar clutches, I'm afraid."

"Comanche get shot in wheel-lodge camp. Comanche get kill with knife in bottom. Young white brave, he kill. Try save Lily-Face. Both get free, but more Comanche come. Tie both up. Big Fox get kill in camp, when braves run fast; stampede mules. Mebbe so other braves no see die. Big Fox, he Comanche. Turtle, he Big Fox now. Waugh! It is good."

Without another word the Tonkaway whirled his quirt in the air, bringing the torturing lash around the hams of the mustang with a hiss and sounding whack, and the animal, with a snort of pain and fright, shot through the party of whites and disappeared, crashing through the undergrowth in their rear toward the plain which had been so recently the scene of the startling and strange events we have recorded.

Old Rocky ejected a squirt of tobacco-juice viciously into the bushes and then said, in a tone that showed his disappointment:

"Hit's too dang'd bad! Hit makes me sick enough ter puke up my ham-strings ter see ther Tonk git onter one o' his rarin', tarin' stompedes arter bleed an' ha'r."

"He's bilyus es a hungry yaller wolf, an' yer c'u'dn't persuade him ter make a crook in ther trail he's decided onter, no more'n yer c'u'd drive a wile-hog on a bee-line!"

"Dang'd ef I ain't afeard he's checked through ter kingdom come, without ha'r; an', jist es likely es not, thar won't be enough meat left on his cartridge arter ther torterers gits through with him ter feed a new-borned catfish."

"Fred, we'-uns hes gut ter run ther thing alone, I reckon. We hes gut ter save Louis an' Lorine, an' mebbe so ther Tonk besides. Things air gittin' mixeder an' mixeder."

All had, by this time, started on toward the camp, as Turtle disappeared; the old scout grumbling thus, as he rode by the side of Frio Fred, whose features told plainly how desperate and hopeless he considered the position of the maiden whom he secretly loved; notwithstanding the encouraging words Old Rocky had made use of since the sad scene on the plain, and which Fred knew were spoken for the benefit of the almost crazed father of the captives.

"I'll risk Turtle," said the young scout, striving to throw off his despondency. "We know that he speaks the Comanche tongue as well as that of his own tribe; and, although it may be known that Big Fox was shot, it would not seem strange or remarkable that he was not killed, and had returned.

"The Tonkaway understands his business, and will doubtless arrange everything; for his life hangs by a hair, if he enters the Comanche camp, which I have no doubt he will. Few men would take such a risk to save others, and they of a different race, and with whom he has never even spoken. Turtle is one of Nature's noblemen, if his skin is red."

"That's whar ye're gittin' him down fine, whar he b'longs. Dang hit! What did he mean 'bout Louis gittin' away with a Curmancy, an' sottin' Loreen free? He's foun' out somethin' fresh since he struck ther Llano, an' that's what's set him a-goin'. Ef Louis socked a knife through a brave, Turtle 'u'd go through fire ter free him."

"He's a true man, that friend of yours," exclaimed the colonel, arousing himself from a labyrinth of dread thoughts. "I feel that much depends upon his exertions. Perhaps Big Bill will know what the Tonkaway discovered in regard to my children, and where they were secreted.

"Turtle must have had some time to investigate, for we have necessarily traveled slowly since he left us in the first place."

"Wa-al, hit may all come out hunk; but I'm worytated 'bout Tonk, 'cos he's so ormighty brash. He can't 'spect ter keep a grip on his ha'r alwais; 'specially when he's runnin' his head plum inter ther wustest Curmancy lay-out he kin find. Hyer we air, boyees! An' Big Bill hev gut things straightened out. Reckon he kin 'spain what ther Tonk hev bin doin' since he 'roved."

As the old scout spoke, all broke into the camp, finding that the fires were blazing, and Big Bill with his pards bustling about, having replaced the harness, and set the negroes to mending the broken portions. The mules and horses were all huddled together in the "open"; having been driven in from the plain by the two teamsters. Bill had ordered this, as he dashed on alone, to prevent any harm befalling the Tonkaway, whom the Mexicans and negroes would suppose to be a Comanche.

Several fine saddle-horses were lariated to a wagon-wheel. These were in good condition, showing but little bad effects from the stampede.

The Mexicans and the negroes were in a sadly demoralized state, the latter being greatly affected by the killing of one of their number by the Comanches. But they were all greatly rejoiced at the return of their master, and those who they felt would protect them from murder or capture.

Bill had ordered the women to prepare a meal and extra food for the trail, and also to prepare coffee immediately upon his arrival.

For this Jackson complimented him on having more solid sense on the occasion than any one in the party. In a few words Bill explained that Turtle had sprung from his horse as soon as he reached the camp, the speaker having overtaken him and prevented the guard from firing at him, but with much difficulty.

The Mexicans had reported the disappearance of Pedro, and the direction from whence the shriek of Lorine, and the whoops of the Comanches had been heard was pointed out to him.

Turtle had then darted into the timber on the run, with torch in hand, to study the "sign." He had then discovered the body of the Mexican, caught by a fallen tree that lay partly in the stream.

The Tonkaway succeeded in finding the place of conflict between the Comanche and the youth and maiden, and also the place on the west side of the river, where the two captives had been secured to saplings. This had been more from instinct and a knowledge of the direction whence the sounds had proceeded than aught else.

"There is no doubt," said Bill, "that Louis killed

the Indian that had Miss Lorine captive, and that he then rescued her, but both were retaken by some new arrivals."

"Dang'd ef leetle Louis ain't a rip-snorter fer his inches! Curnil, yer orter be proud of him, an' I sw'ar I begins ter think he kin do a heap towards makin' ther git-away easy arter we cuts him loose. Thet air, ef we'-uns bees lucky enough ter 'complish hit."

"There is no time to talk or linger," said Fred, already engaged in saddling a fresh horse. "I shall go mad if we are not soon on the plain."

Colonel La Coste, with a hard, set look that was painful to behold, also hastily equipped another horse. Our friends were soon ready.

"Thet's ther p'ogramme clean through," agreed Old Rocky, "but I lows we'-uns hev gut ter load up wi' some grub an' coffee afore we starts on ther rampage, sides packin' somethin' ter chaw 'long o' us. I'm goin' fer coffee on ther jump, fer that's hefty biz ahead, er I'm a double-barreled har!

"We'-uns 'll need all the strength an' vim the law 'lows, ter scrouge through ther scrape without gittin' our heads skinned; though I'm sottin' out calkerlatin' ter git the leetle ones, er sarve es ther biggest draw in the Curmancy fandango. I allers 'specter ter draw my last breathes ter the music o' Injin yells, wi' ther condemned scarifiers hoppin' 'roun' me; an' hit won't stop this hyer big ball o' dirt from whirlin' ef I goes on ther fly ter kingdom come, on ther San Saba, tryin' ter resky a gal angel from ther red whelps o' Satan."

The old scout now whispered to Frio Fred:

"Hit 'pears ter me, pard, that yer kinder givin' yerself away, es 'gards Loreen. I sw'ar yer hez acted es though ye thought a heap more o' her than her own dad does; an' he couldn't help noticin' hit, ef his head warn't full o' grief an' tortur' hisself. All ther t'others hes see'd that ye're actin' a dang'd sight more bilyus than ther thing calls fer, without ther gal war a bleed-relation; an' they doesn't sot hit down that-a-way."

"Thanks, old pard," returned Fred; "but I can't help it. I believe I'm going mad. The thoughts of Lorine being the victim of that hellish horde of demons will drive me mad. I must act."

"She must be saved at once. Think of the possible consequences of ten minutes' delay! Great heavens! I dare not think of it. And that brave youth, too—think of him, dying a lingering death by torture, that would put the very fiends to the blush!"

"Hit won't do ter think o' nothin', 'ceptin' sarcumventin' ther condemned kiotes. Yer brain air on ther whirl, an' yer won't be wo'th shucks, ef yer doesn't simmer down ter biz. Ther leetle ones air safe fer half a moon, fur es that goes—I'll afferdavy on hit!"

"Then cusses hes lost some braves, what gut that heads skinned, an' ther squaws et ther village'll howl fer victims ter tortur'. They'll take 'em up toward ther head o' ther Brazos, an' we'-uns 'll hev plenty o' show ter resky 'em, ef we plays our p'ints. Hit's bad enough ter hev ther ole man 'long. One crazy human in ther outfit 'll do a heap o' damidge, I'm 'lowin', without havin' two; which 'll bu'st us plum up, an' ther leetle ones 'll be goners."

"So, brace up, an' come 'round nat'ral ef yer wants ter hev Loreen kick pararer flowers free an' airy ag'in, while yer walk 'longside o' her, an' she shoots love from her peepers inter yourn, es she thanks yer fer savin' her life."

"Thanks, again, old pard," said the young man, with much agitation, as he grasped Old Rocky's hand; "I'll be myself once more, and more than myself; for there's the strength of a giant—the will of a dozen men—in me, from the time we get near the red demons."

"Ye gods! How I could rush into that war-party! I believe that we two, with Turtle, could save Lorine and Louis, by a headlong dash, if we could get near enough to them, on the borders of their camp."

"Hit's too risky, an' yer knows hit, Fred. Ef ther war a red, nigh ter 'em, he'd knife 'em at onc't. We'-uns hes ter glide easy-like, an' I sw'a'r I b'lieve we'll have ter tie ther curnil, er he'll bu'st up ther hull biz."

"Howsomever, we'll watch him, an' see ef mebbe so he git's more nat'ral-like."

One of the negroes now summoned all the party to break their fasts; and this was a welcome call to the two scouts, who had not eaten since the previous morning in camp.

They now persuaded Colonel La Coste, by every possible argument, to fortify his stomach with nearly a quart of black coffee; Jackson taking this time to request him to make one of the party, as well as Big Bill, who had felt hurt at being left out, by apparently common consent.

"Dang'd ef I thought o' hit afore!" exclaimed the old scout, speaking with his mouth nearly full of corn-pone.

"I reckon, ther two pards o' your kin take ther train up-stream, an' sorter lay low inter some bend, whar hit's easy ter stan' off ther reds, ef they runs up towards Fort Mason, which I air opinin' they won't dar'."

"Jackson an' Bill, yer kin come erlong, es we'-uns can't jist 'zactly tell what sorter game we hes ter play; that is, ef ther curnil 'll risk his outfit in such a circus."

"Ther niggers won't be scarey, arter yer glides outen this camp. What did yer say, curnil? Thet yer'll take 'em 'long?"

"We'll take all the men, and let the women run the train, if there is use for them," answered Colonel La Coste, quickly, as he recovered partially from his fit of mental abstraction, upon being thus directly addressed; and, hearing the question repeated, he said:

"Let the train go to the dickens! If I can o'ly get back my children, I care for nothing else in the wide world."

"Ya-as, that's all very fine," remarked Old Rocky; "but we'-uns don't 'low ter lose nothin', ef hit kin be helped."

"Jackson kin git ther train hitched up, es soon es he kin, an' start 'em off. Yer kin go, Jackson, an' Bill too; fer yer won't be needed. Yer two pards kin run ther train, an' keep things straight, I reckon."

In another minute, all was bustle and confusion in the camp.

The mules were quickly harnessed, the utensils packed, and the women and children, relieved and elated to leave, what they one and all considered an accursed spot, all clambered, without more ado, into their wagon.

The dead negro had been buried, by order of Jackson, so there was no further delay; and the slaves, with tears in their eyes, and much lamentation at leaving their old master, who might be killed, and in regard to the two missing ones—their young master and mistress—took the places of the dead teamsters; one of Big Bill's pards, acting as wagon-master.

The train rolled out of camp, with orders to turn up the river upon reaching the plain, keeping on the border of the timber, and not to halt for ten miles.

Fifteen minutes after, the two scouts, with Colonel La Coste, Jackson, and Big Bill, all well mounted, and the latter leading the black steed of the Tonkaway—Jackson also having two extra horses—all proceeded to the plain, and galloping down the river, on the border of the timber, for five miles or more, turned upon the plain, going at headlong speed toward the Rio San Saba, west. Thus keeping such a distance from the war-party, in the track they had taken in their return; aiming to strike the San Saba, some five miles north of the point at which the Comanches had formed their cordon around the scouts and Turtle, and where the Indians, with their captives, would undoubtedly encamp upon their return from the Rio Llano.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEAVE HOPE BEHIND.

WHEN the half-dozen Comanches, on their wild-eyed steeds, plunged from the undergrowth into the small "open," on the border of which Louis and his sister were secured, the former was most terribly concerned, and for three reasons.

First and foremost, notwithstanding the crashing of bush and branch, and the snorting of the tortured mustangs, together with the whoops of the hideous savages, Lorine manifested no knowledge of the presence of the new arrivals; her fair form being bent forward, her whole weight upon the bonds which bound waist and wrists to the saplings, and her long hair hanging nearly to the sward, completely veiling her features.

To behold this was most agonizing to Louis, who had striven with all his power of will to control himself, and not to reveal to his sister the hopeless despair that overwhelmed him upon her recapture, and himself being taken by the Indians.

Secondly, the arrival of the Comanches at the point where he had slain the brave who had first captured Lorine, and this second party led the youth to decide, with good reason, that there were many Indians in the vicinity, who by runners had communicated with each other.

Thirdly, from the fact that the present party had given a low whoop, simultaneously, so near the camp, the location of which their manner proved must be known to them—this indicated that they had no doubts as to their being able to massacre all in the camp, and then plunder it.

As they galloped away, with the horses of the first party in the lead, Louis had no further doubt in regard to a regularly organized plan having been carried out to slay all that belonged to the wagon-train, and appropriate all their effects.

As all this flashed upon the mind of the intelligent boy, who fully believed that his father had been killed by the Indians—and the teamsters and negroes as well—he almost shrieked, in his agony of spirit.

From the fact, that the herd of mules, which he knew had been on the plain grazing, had been driven in, as the stampede proved, Louis knew that his father had returned from his search after Lorine, to the camp, and had ordered in the animals; consequently, the colonel, and the whole force of teamsters, must have been with the wagons at the time of attack, and all, without doubt, had been massacred.

After the departure of the six braves, the youth, observing that the single Indian who guarded them, was faced toward, and intently listening to the din at the camp, made a most desperate effort to break loose; and, as he had previously worked at an attempt to burst the buckskin thongs, perspiring much in his exertions, which served to moisten and stretch the skin—he, to his joy, realized that he could pull out his right hand.

This meant freedom to him, and to Lorine.

In his pocket was a jack-knife, which, in the haste of the Indians, had escaped notice when they disarmed him. He quickly thrust his hand in now, and jerked out the knife, opening the blade with his teeth, and trembling greatly, in his excitement.

The next moment, he had slashed himself free, but he remained in the same position as he had been, endeavoring to think what next he should do, or, in other words, how he should proceed to kill the single brave, who stood between him and freedom.

And now, to his utmost disappointment, verging upon despair, the brave half turned, and proceeded

to readjust the saddles on the mustangs; after which, he threw himself upon the sward, directly opposite Lorine, where he could watch both captives.

To describe the feelings of Louis La Coste, at this moment, would be impossible.

All chance of liberty seemed wrested from him, for he knew that if he made a movement, which gave the supple, sinewy brave the slightest suspicion that he had loosened his bonds, the Indian would pounce upon, and perhaps kill him at once; for, except his pocket-knife, he was without a weapon.

So excited and nervous was the youth, at this unlooked-for state of affairs, that his brain reeled, and the sweat stood in great beads upon his forehead; for he feared that he would fall prostrate, and thus end all hope of escape.

He quickly leaned backward against the sapling, placing his head against it, and clutching at the rough bark to maintain his position, as it had been when bound. He dared not now look at the hideous, paint-daubed fiend at his feet, lest he might betray his secret in the mere glance.

Thus the boy remained for a long time, being forced to bring all his strength of will and body to the front to retain his position, his limbs at times trembling greatly; and when at last the warrior arose quickly, and stepped to his former position to listen again to the sounds of the stampede, and the yell now far away toward the west plain—then the brave youth set his teeth and determined that he would risk all in one grand attempt to slay his Comanche guard.

The warrior had left his bow and quiver of arrows on the ground where he had been lying; but Louis well knew that he could not draw that bow sufficiently to send an arrow with any force.

This he had learned from Old Rocky, as it required practice from childhood; the bows being made more stiff each year of practice with them.

There was no other weapon at hand, however, and he determined to clutch an arrow and plunge into the back of his red foe, at a vital point.

The long scalping-knife in the belt of the warrior, he might, by a sleight of hand, obtain, and use it with electric-like velocity the next instant after plunging in the arrow. Delay, he had learned, was dangerous; and, as his thoughts were like flashes of light, the Indian had not stood a moment when the daring youth clutched an arrow, and with one far-reaching bound, plunged, with all his strength, the steel-pointed shaft into the warrior's back, below the shoulder-blade; the weapon luckily failing to come in contact with either rib or back-bone.

No sooner had the arrow entered the Indian than the latter, with a horrible yell, wrenched backward, attempting to whirl and grapple with Louis, at the same time clutching wildly at his knife-hilt. But the lad was quicker, and jerked the scalping-knife from the belt of his foe, driving, with the quickness and strength of desperation, the weapon to the hilt in his victim's painted breast.

But the brave caught Louis in his death-grasp, his features contorted with awful agony, his snake-like eyes bulging, his mouth agape, and blood welling over his lips.

Thus, reeling, trembling, and panting, stood the pair; a white boy and a burly red brave—the boy sick with horror, and the brave on the borders of death! Thus, for an age it seemed to Louis, they stood. Then the eyes of the Comanche rolled skyward, a horrible death-howl, almost stifled by a burst of blood, came from the doomed warrior, and he fell with a sickening thud to the sward, bearing Louis with him as he went.

Thus both lay for a moment; the youth so paralyzed with sickening horror, and weakened by his Herculean efforts and the fear of failure, that he could not move—the death-clutch of the Indian upon his throat, impeding breath.

At this moment poor Lorine revived, and raising herself erect, tossed back her hair by a movement of her head—not knowing where she was or what had occurred. The first sight that met her horrified gaze was her brother clutched in the grasp of a Comanche, both prostrate and covered with blood, an arrow of moonlight playing about the ghastly face of Louis, now rendered still more so from contrasts with the stains of gore.

She could not see his eyes, but the glaring and glassy orbs of the dead brave seemed to gaze into and pierce her very soul, congealing the blood in her veins with horror.

In the uncertain light, she could not see that Louis was panting—that he lived, and that the Comanche was cold and dead!

For an instant, Lorine's tongue clave to the roof of her mouth; but it was only momentarily, or her heart would have broken.

She gave a piercing shriek, her eyes fixed upon Louis; and that shriek acted upon the youth like a galvanic battery. He wrenched himself free from the hideous and revolting corpse, and sprung to his feet, tottering as if stricken with palsy, bloody knife in hand, to his sister; who, with fixed stare, gazed, as in a trance, as much affected by the sudden relief, at finding him still alive, as she had been when she discovered him, as she supposed, murdered.

Gasping for breath, and speechless, Louis at length reached the side of his sister, and slashed the cruel cords that had cut into her tender flesh; the maiden falling forward, unable now to stand, on account of impeded circulation.

Himself as helpless as his sister, Louis fell with her, each clasping, in a stiff and unnatural manner, their benumbed arms about the other. But soon there followed a crashing of bushes, and two mounted braves urged their mustangs into the

"open," nearly crushing the brother and sister beneath their hoofs.

With yells of fury, and howls for the dead, the warriors sprung to the earth; and, before Louis and Lorine fully comprehended the terrible change, they were bound upon the backs of mustangs, and being hastened through the wood westward; the dead brave being also secured to his saddle, his limbs bound beneath the animal's belly, his bow lashed to his back and head, keeping him thus in a natural position on his last earthly ride.

The two braves urged the horses of the captives, and that of the corpse at headlong speed; soon breaking from the timber, and out upon the moonlit plain, over which they were now rapidly forced, both dazed with this new despair.

Twice had they been free, twice nearly ready to hasten from a slain foe; and then found themselves again bound captives, before they had time, in their bewilderment, to realize what had occurred. This was enough to break up all hope, to be forced to decide that they were doomed; but yet another most tantalizing experience was destined to be theirs—again were their hopes to be awakened, only to be dashed to fragments, and they once more hurled into the most dense and dark depths of despair!

Not a word had passed the lips of either since Louis had cut Lorine free from the sapling.

Under the circumstances, this was not strange.

These sudden changes, from captivity to freedom, and back to captivity; the suffering from their cruel bonds; the fatigue and agony consequent upon impeded circulation; the horrible scenes through which they had passed, and the but too probable dread and awful torture and death to come—all this nearly seared their brains; and it was some minutes after they had set out upon the plain, before the unfortunate victims of Indians realized that they had gotten free from the dark bottom-timber, and were now speeding over the prairie, in the calm moonlight.

Both had closed their eyes in an endeavor to collect their dazed thoughts; and, when they gazed over the plain, and discovered the strange panoramic scene—that is, the stampeding herd, with the Indians in pursuit, and the whites in the rear of the reds, in chase of the latter—all these galloping west; while, from that direction, galloped three white men and an Indian, evidently pursued by a large body of Comanches—when this sight burst upon the view of Louis and his sister, they were dumbfounded with amazement.

This, however, soon merged into relief and intense joy, as they saw the whites shoot down the seven Indians, and realized that both parties of their friends would soon be together; while the large party of pursuing savages were quite a distance off.

The sight gave Louis new life and hope, as well as to Lorine; the former crying out with joy:

"Look, Lorine, Look! They have not killed our men. There is Old Rocky, and Frio Fred, and Jackson! Yes, and I verily believe there is the Tonkaway Indian, the scouts have told us so much about."

"Thank Heaven! There is a chance for us yet. Oh, sis, wasn't it terrible, to be taken again, after such struggles to be free? But you must bear up, or you will die!"

"Oh, Louis! I cannot bear to think of going through the same horror again. Where can poor father be? And why has not some effort been made to rescue us? Surely our lives are of more importance than the mules!"

"We have experienced enough of changes and terrors," said the boy, "to know that events may occur that we would not have dreamed of as possible. We know nothing of what has happened to prevent them from rescuing us. I do not believe that they could trace us up, but I am sure they have done their best. But do look in our rear, Lorine! As sure as fate, there comes father, riding like the wind, and all alone!"

The excitement of their guards, and a deviation from the course previously traveled, caused Louis thus to look behind them; when he discovered their father riding wildly in pursuit.

But poor Lorine, thus directed by Louis, no sooner saw her parent, than she burst into tears of joy the most intense. This, the words of her brother increased, as he again cried out:

"The scouts are coming, Lorine! And all our men are with them, as I live! They have discovered us, and will save us!

"Look, do look! It is perfectly fearful! There is a large war-party, who are trying to reach us in advance of our friends; and these red devils are urging our horses toward them. But they can't—they must not!"

"Oh, Father in Heaven, save us! save us! Do not allow the merciless demons to conquer!"

"I can see nothing of all that, Louis," said the girl. "I am blinded by tears that I cannot wipe away. What do you mean? Are we not to be saved after all?"

"Oh, what did you say? I shall die—I shall die, if Fred does not rescue us! I am faint—deathly faint—and my tears seem to be drying up!"

Side by side the captives rode, and the youth was now prevented from saving more, by realizing that one of the guards was about to shoot at Colonel La Coste, who was now fast nearing them, with revolver in hand.

The poor boy could not articulate a word.

His agony of mind was terrible.

Lorine's eyes cleared, just in time to see her loved father shot, and fall from his horse to the prairie sward.

Then she gave a piercing shriek, and Louis uttered a groan of deepest anguish.

Both then gazed toward the scouts, and the teamsters, and were just in time to see Frio Fred's horse fall dead and the young scout himself hurled to the earth, where he lay motionless, and apparently dead.

Then, yells of exultation, of savage joy, almost deafened them; and they found themselves amid a great horde of war-painted, feather-bedizened Comanches—the main war-party, that had now galloped up.

Surely now there was no hope!

Their friends could not save them!

Lorine sunk forward, her long hair mingling with the mane of the mustang to which she was bound; and the yelling demons, on all sides of her, firing in one mad whirlpool, that was, for a moment headed back in the direction of the San Saba, and now lashing their mustangs at headlong speed.

"Oh, God! Take us home!" cried out Louis La Coste, from his inmost soul.

But his prayer was not answered.

CHAPTER XV.

A FORLORN HOPE.

AGAIN was the long suffering and most agonized Louis tortured beyond conception.

Had there ever, since the world was created, been a youthful mind more overwhelmed with excruciating agony of heart and soul, in so short a time?

Louis believed it to be impossible.

Had he not been blessed with an evenly balanced and strong mind, he would most certainly, under such an awful strain, have gone insane. He had seen his father shot down in an endeavor to save his children, and this sight had well-nigh blinded him and stopped the beating of his heart. Then the fall of Frio Fred's horse, hurling the young scout to the earth, apparently lifeless—and all this in a moment.

The failure of the scouts and teamsters to cut off the pair of savages, who held himself and his sister captive, was a most unexpected and despairing fact; and, as the horrid horde of yelling demons swept down upon and inclosed them in a perfect mass of snorting and frenzied steeds flying here and there, bearing their frightful forms, with flaunting feathers and scalp-decorated lances, it was a sight that Louis La Coste felt could never be forgotten by him were he to live a thousand years. Indeed, it must, in day as well as in night dreams, haunt him, for it had all been indelibly branded upon his brain.

And, to cap all this horror, the sight of poor Lorine, senseless, and upheld by her long hair in the saddle, by the clutch of a red, fiend-like Comanche, who galloped by her side, her death-like, angelic face upturned to the silvery moon—held thus, in that cruel clutch—this was most agonizing and most terrible.

In the anguish of his soul, poor Louis shrieked aloud; but his cry was drowned amid the clamor of the yelling horde, as they sped on, their quirks hissing through the air; on, toward the San Saba—toward torture and death; death to him, and far worse than death to the beautiful, innocent, and helpless Lorine.

And, awful as were the sights, and sounds, and thoughts, to the suffering youth, his dread surroundings were made more fearful still. For, with devilish object, the galloping demons caused all the mustangs upon which the dead were lashed—extra horses having served for this purpose—to be driven in around the captives.

Louis thanked God that Lorine was unconscious, that she saw not this terrible sight, that she had been insensible during the hellish gallop. And he prayed most fervently, for strength to bear it all, to preserve his faculties for his sister's sake, although there seemed not the slightest hope that he or any one else could be of further use in mitigating her sufferings, or saving her from a fate of which he dared not even think.

So great had been, and was, during the scenes on the plain, the strain upon the boy's mind, that, before half the distance to the Rio San Saba was passed, he had arrived at a state of mind between sanity and insanity; his brain, being as it were, partially benumbed, and beyond the feelings of intense misery, anguish and despair, that had so tortured him previously.

And on flew the fiendish horde, like demons let loose from some inferno, for the night, to curse the earth; and who, bent upon improving their brief allowance of time, flew like dry leaves before a gale; the hoofs of their mustangs fast flying through the prairie grass, causing a weird and rushing sound, like the warning breath of a fierce "norther."

This speed, however, was moderated presently, from necessity; for the mustangs could not long maintain that headlong gallop. Equine animals of other blood and rearing, would have dropped dead upon the plain. Yet, although there seemed to be no object for this terrible speed, it was certain that the red chief, Rolling Thunder, would not have allowed it except to favor his future plans.

He had realized, at once, that the scouts, the Tonkaway, and the other whites would, with their fast-shooting guns, kill at least half of his war-party, before he could hope to capture them.

Already he had had proof sufficient to make him prudent. He had not given up the idea of securing the mules, and plundering the camp on the Rio Llano; but he resolved to move toward the object with a certainty of success, having decided to return to the San Saba, organize a stronger party of braves, as far as numbers went, and then, mounting fresh mustangs, gallop toward the Rio Llano at once.

His haste was occasioned by the knowledge that

he would be forced to send out some of his young warriors, to collect the small scouting-parties together for the proposed expedition.

The death of such a number of his warriors, many of whom had been scalped, infuriated the chief; and he knew that the only way to cover up the disaster and death, and to keep his followers from laying this to mismanagement on his part, was to secure as many white captives as possible for the torture. That Turtle, the Tonkaway, must be taken, Rolling Thunder had sworn by the bones of a thousand chiefs.

The renegade red must die by slow torture, amid the hootings of the squaws and young ones, of the village at the head of the Brazos.

He would not allow an arrow to be shot at the hated Tonkaway; who must be taken, even were a dozen warriors sacrificed in the attempt.

At length the Comanche horde, long before the day began to dawn, galloped slowly to the timber that marked the course of the Rio San Saba; and were greeted by fearful howls, as the scalpless dead were discovered, followed by exultant yells, as the white captives were unbound from the panting mustangs, after the river had been forded.

It was an admirable position for a camp, that chosen by the Comanches; being upon the west bank of the river, the ground for some distance from it gradually rising, and clear of bushes or stone. A carpet of dead leaves, compact and springy, covered the ground, upon which not a spear of grass was visible; the space described being arched with branches, from which depended drooping moss, in festoons, that contributed a weird look to the wild scene.

A space fully a hundred feet long, extending back from the river some sixty feet, the bank of the stream without undergrowth, and some twenty feet above the water, which, directly at the bank, was thick with reeds and rushes. Such was the peculiar "open," the like of which is often seen in the locality of which we write.

Poor Louis and Lorine were immediately, with jeer and triumphant ejaculations, hurried in a rough manner to the west side of the camp, the fair girl as yet unconscious, and carried in the arms of a burly brave. She was there placed against a tree-trunk, in a standing position, being secured to the tree while sustained by the Indian, and the lariats wound about her in a way that would have caused her great suffering had she been conscious, impeding circulation and thus benumbing her whole system.

Louis groaned in agony of soul as he witnessed this merciless and most cruel act. He was then thrown upon his back, and four stakes having been driven into the ground, the savages bound his wrists and ankles to the same, drawing his limbs tightly, and leaving him in a crucified position, in which he was forced to look upward into his sister's face.

And poor Lorine—should she recover—must witness the torture of her brother also.

The words of advice given by Old Rocky to Turtle caused the Tonkaway to view his proposed plan in a somewhat different light. He began to reason before he reached the border of the Rio Llano timber that it would not be prudent to join the Comanches on the plain, as his failing to join the party with the captives would be judged as very strange, even though he had been supposed to be wounded, and would serve to draw the attention of all the keen-eyed Comanches upon him.

All the stampeding party had been slain, and the two braves who were with the captive probably knew this and that Big Fox had been instantly killed. Thus reflecting Turtle decided to follow the war-party, but to keep far in the rear and avoid being seen. He could then skulk into the camp, and with greater safety and much more hope of success in assisting the captives, from the fact that he was now in the "make-up" of a Comanche warrior.

This decision he communicated to one of the teamsters, who had been delayed by a long chase up the river after a valuable horse that had broken away from the stampede, and he bade the teamster inform the scouts that he would be on the lookout for them as soon as he had ascertained the position of affairs at the San Saba.

By this change of arrangements, the Tonkaway was forced to gallop more to the north, striking the timber of the Rio San Saba at some distance from the camp of his foes. Then, under cover of the timber, he proceeded as near to the camp as was prudent, with his horse, and then left the animal in a dense thicket.

Fifteen minutes later the faithful Tonkaway was reconnoitering the Comanche camp, crawling snake-like through the undergrowth, and thus ascertaining the position of all the sentinels. And, from the limb of a tree, over the singular "open," he inspected the whole encampment; noticing especially many particulars in regard to the captives, whose torturing positions could be plainly seen.

The sight of "Lily-Face," as Turtle had dubbed Lorine, caused him great anxiety. He longed for the early appearance of the rescuing-party, for he feared that the poor girl would die if not soon relieved from both her mental and physical agony. But they must speedily arrive.

The Tonkaway well knew that the scouts and the other members of their party would reach the San Saba soon after he himself did, as they would not delay in the Rio Llano camp, and besides would have fresh horses, which they would by no means spare.

Still, for all this, there might not be time to perfect and perform a plan of rescue before daylight would be upon them, and force them all to delay proceedings until the following night.

With these thoughts filling his mind, Turtle made his way up the river again to the place where he had left his horse, without having been detected in his most hazardous mission.

Just as he reached the thicket a chorus of most hideous howls, from at least twoscore of throats, sounded from the Comanche camp.

"Waugh!" burst from the Tonkaway, with an intonation that expressed his great satisfaction and relief.

The horrible howls proved that the Comanches were solemnizing the death-dance over their slain.

No more agreeable sound could, in the estimation of the listening Tonkaway, have disturbed the night air, for it gave promise of drawing the attention of the warriors from the captives, and in that way favored a rescue.

While listening to the demoniac sound, a panther-like shriek, followed quickly by an imitation of the howl of a black wolf, repeated three times, was detected by the keen-eared Turtle, and with another "Waugh!" expressing increased relief and pleasure, he bounded through the undergrowth and up the river.

CHAPTER XVI.

READY FOR THE RESCUE.

WHEN Turtle had reached such a distance from his horse, as he believed placed him in the vicinity of the point from whence the signal had proceeded, he halted, and imitated several times the hoot of an owl. This was soon answered by another wolf-howl near at hand.

Two minutes after, the Tonkaway glided into the thicket, passed through, and emerged on the opposite side, into a small moonlit space. Here he stood erect, with folded arms, and within a few feet of five men, who there sat their horses.

"Dang my dorgs, old pard's, ef ye hedn't spit ther pertickler music I 'spect'd, I'd ha' planted my sticker deep inter yer 'natermy; fer I swar ye've just ther pictur' of a cussed Curmaneh."

Thus rattled off Old Rocky, in a low voice.

"Lily-Face tie to tree. No know nothing. Young white brave tie on ground. He heap torture. Heap good time save captives."

"Then, for God's sake, let us hasten!" said the colonel.

"You must not go, colonel," put in Frio Fred. "You will hazard the lives of your children, for you do not realize the extreme caution that is necessary. How is it, Turtle? Can we take the horses nearer?"

"Turtle mustang two shoots—" pointing toward the Comanche camp—"Lead all mustangs up river. It is good. Stay with horses, white hair chief. Comanche got sharp ears."

All now dismounted, Colonel La Coste groaning, and in a woful state, at being denied the privilege of assisting in the rescue of his own flesh and blood; but, as all led their horses up the river stealthily, Frio Fred, in a low voice, reasoned with the old man, and finally succeeded in pacifying him—persuading him that his friends knew what was best in the emergency.

The colonel was then left in care of the animals, and in a state of mind bordering upon insanity. Each moment was an hour to him; in fact he could not have suffered more mental agony and anguish, and continued to live.

But a little distance from where they had left the colonel, the scouts, with Jackson, Bill, and Turtle, halted for consultation; the latter explaining the position of the camp, and where the guards were posted. These, it so happened, were just five in number—one for each!

"Every dang'd one on 'em must be wiped out," said the old scout, "an' not lowed ter gi'n a death-yell; er we're bu'sted, dead sure! Me an' Turtle'll take ther pa'r on ther south side; Fred, ther cuss back o' ther camp, nex' ter ther leetle ones; an' t'other two, Bill an' Jackson kin hash as they're a mind ter."

"That's ther p'ogramme, an' ef hit kin be did, we'll play a leetle circus onto them, that'll skeer ther bugs all outen ther scalps."

"Good, heap good! Old Rocky great brave!" agreed Turtle. "Come! No time talk on war-path."

"Hold on a minut'" ordered the old scout.

He then gave explicit instructions to Jackson, as to the manner in which they should proceed to kill the sentinels, without allowing them to give a danger-signal, or death-yell. The Tonkaway then pointed out to Big Bill and Jackson the two guards, whose lives they were to end.

The party then separated on their desperate mission, all fully instructed in the terrible programme.

Leaving them thus, we will now proceed to inspect the Comanche camp.

At the time when Turtle, peering down from the tree-branch, examined each detail, that might favor a rescue, or prove the reverse, the Comanches were feasting upon the flesh of a horse which they had killed for the purpose.

But this repast lasted not long; for, after the departure of Turtle from his lurking-place, Rolling Thunder, the Comanche chief, issued an order, in a low, guttural tone; and all the braves proceeded to repaint their faces in a more hideous manner than before.

This done, Rolling Thunder indicated his further wishes by rapid gestures, his eyes blazing with vengeful fury toward the captives. At this several braves rushed to the spot where Louis and Lorine were bound, the fair girl having now partially recovered consciousness, though dazed with horror, at the awful position in which she found herself.

Most appropriate now was the cognomen of "Lily-Face" which Turtle had bestowed upon her; but perhaps "Snow-Face" would have been even more

so, as she was now the pallor of death, and indeed nearer death than life.

When the savages approached her it caused not the slightest change in the expression of her countenance, or any light in her eyes.

Both she and Louis were cut loose and roughly dragged into the middle of the "open;" but, being unable to stand, they were bound to the same stake, back to back.

This was quickly accomplished, and then the blood-smeared, scalpless corpses of the slain braves were laid, in a horrible circle, around the tortured pair; the bodies being placed upon their backs, and the glassy eyes seeming to glare fixedly at the captives.

Louis shuddered, but Lorine's frozen face betrayed no emotion whatever.

The poor maiden was beyond being further appalled or horrified.

Then, forming two circles, one within the other—the outer one being the braves of inferior rank—the hellish horde gave vent to a series of demoniac howls, such as would curdle the blood of the bravest man who ever lived. But the hapless pair started not.

At the first howl all assumed a crouching position, and the red fiends, with slow hop and gesticulation, keeping time with their howls, circled around their dead and the captives—the inner ring one way and the outer ring the opposite—then, changing, and moving in faster time, to the horrid accompaniment.

These sounds betrayed nothing to the Tonkaway, beyond the fact of the death-dance. He had no suspicion that Louis and Lorine had been removed from the border of the camp, where, by the removal of the guards, they could have been approached without the rescuers being observed.

For a long time the death-dance was continued; changing, at length, to terrific bounds in the air, the warriors whirling like tops, and jumping on every side, hacking the air with their weapons, and feigning to hurl them at the captives.

Turtle, although the interior of the "open" could not be seen, knew at once, by the yells and whoops, that the plans which had been made were now as naught—that the captives had been removed to the middle of the "open."

Bending forward a short distance—Old Rocky at his side, and perfectly safe from discovery—the Tonkaway halted, and pointed forward, clutching with the other hand the shoulder of the old scout.

"Cuss my cats!" hissed Old Rocky; "our gravy's spilled, dead sure! Tonk, we've gut ter dash in on our critters, er ther leetle ones air gones!"

"Good! Turtle sound war-cry when on mustang. Ride fast. Shoot quick. Save Lily-Face. Save young white brave. Come! Get Fred. Get other white brothers. No time talk. Whoop heap. Shoot heap. Ride heap fast. Waugh!"

As it providentially happened, Frio Fred had not gained much distance from his pards. He was now caught by them, and dragged backward; the old scout taking him in charge, and explaining, at a safe distance the situation of affairs.

The relief of Colonel La Coste, upon being told that he was to have his wish, and charge to the rescue of his children was intense. All now sprung upon their horses—Old Rocky saying, quickly.

"All on yer, cut, slash, an' shoot es much as yer kin, an' es lively es yer kin; an' me an' Fred'll jist wade in wi' yer, fast dash, on ther speedy trigger-pullin' biz; but nary one on yer make a move ter ther leetle ones, fer that'll bu'st ther hull 'range-ment."

"All set!" came from the whites.

"War-cry of Tonkaway on Turtle's lips," was the quiet response of the red pard of the scouts.

"Then foller, an' glide easy-like, ontill yer hears me whistle. Then everlastingly job spurs, an' split yer throats a-yellin'. Gii!"

The five determined rescuers, with teeth set, reins in left, and "sixes" in right, at full cock, with every nerve braced for the desperate attempt—certain death before them, if the slightest miss was made—all stole through the bottom-timber, toward the whooping horde, yet whirling and bounding around the corpses, and the captives.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF DESPAIR AND DEATH.

THE rescuers all knew, that, at the instant of alarm, the captives would be butchered in cold blood, if those who sprung forward for this hellish purpose were not instantly shot in their tracks. They knew, too, that success depended upon Lorine and Louis being cut loose at once.

If all had this object in view, it would end in the one hindering the other, and thus be the means of the death of all; hence the arrangement that Fred and Old Rocky should attend to this part of the business—the others, to spur in between them, and the foe, and cover their retreat.

With slow pace, the horses were walked, until on the edge of the undergrowth.

With his bow ready, and arrow fitted to string, revolver and knife in belt for use also, Turtle now shot forward, giving his signal. Like an avalanche of death, the Texans close followed, Old Rocky and Frio Fred in the front, and dashing through the space that had been caused by the Tonkaway's purposely sending a hurtling hail of lead into the breasts of the braves, who strove, after the momentary amazement caused by his arrow shot, to reach the side of the youth and maiden, and plunge their knives into their hearts. Never was there a more complete surprise.

In the wrangle and struggle that followed, and amid the signal yells of Rolling Thunder, the scouts succeeded in cutting the captives loose, and catching

them up before them on their horses; the colonel and Turtle, like avenging fates—the former filled with insane fury and herculean strength—mowed their way in and out of the mass of writhing, yelling fiends, that were being trampled upon by frenzied steeds, that flew here and there, snorting with terror.

The flash and glint of knife and hatchet and a hurrying of red forms to positions designated by the chief, in a moment after the first terrible charge, proved that Rolling Thunder still retained his presence of mind, and, before our friends had realized it, they were encompassed on three sides by a double row of braves—the fourth side being that of the camp nearest to the river.

"Git fer ther drink, er ye're goners! Git, an' glide down ther bank!"

As he thus yelled, the old scout, with Louis in his arms, urged his horse forward, followed by Fred with Lorine. The next moment the horses were swimming with the current, as sounding plunges were heard in their rear.

Turtle and Colonel La Coste, battling for life, saw Jackson and Big Bill dragged from their horses and cut to pieces. They saw, too, that the scouts had escaped into the river; but the maddened colonel fought on, bleeding from many a wound. At last the Tonkaway, with a whoop of defiance, clutched the bridle-rein of the colonel's horse and urged the beast over into the inky depths at the very instant that a cloud of arrows flew over his head, some of them tearing his eagle-feathers as his steed shot down into the Rio San Saba.

The waters of the river were shaded by the high bank from the fire-light of the camp, and were consequently quite dark; especially to the Comanches, whose eyes were blurred by the blaze; and the arrows, as the Indians shot into the river, were without aim at any object.

"Hyer we air, Tonk!" cried out Old Rocky, when Turtle and the colonel had gained some distance down stream. "Cuss my cats, ef we didn't sarcumvent ther bellyuns! Curnil, glide up lyer speedy. Whar in thunderation, air Bill an' Jackson?"

"On long dark trail," replied Turtle, laconically.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed the old scout. "Wa-al, hit can't be helped. Es hit is, tha's a fa'r show fer all the rest on us ter git out with our ha'r."

Colonel La Coste spurred quickly to the side of the animal ridden by Frio Fred, but called out, as he saw his daughter safe, though unconscious:

"Keep her, Mr. Fontaine! You have saved my darling, and she is yours, if God spares her. I have not been blind, and I know what you have felt for each other!"

This he said, and then spurred to the side of Old Rocky, who held Louis, still benumbed and helpless. The old colonel felt young once more.

"No time fer gab!" warned the old scout, as the colonel greeted Louis. "Foller the Tonk! Ef he can't git we'-uns outer this speedy, hit's good-by, big ball o' dirt."

"Waugh!" was the exclamation of the Tonkaway, as he listened, and interpreted the babel of sounds over the stream. "Ride fast. Keep in bush. Mebbe so all scalp, all torture."

With these words, Turtle lashed his mustang through the timber, followed by his friends.

Upon gaining the eastern border of the timber, all in their rear became still as death—ominous of the death, that it seemed impossible almost to escape, for all knew that the Comanches were, by this time, mounted.

Here, Turtle, in place of turning down-stream, headed his mustang southward, and all proceeded, at as fast a pace as possible, and keeping within and on the border of the bottom-timber. Thus, for a quarter of a mile; then, as the stream made a bend westward, they emerged from the trees, and galloped at full speed, south, until the gray streaks of morning began to light up the orient.

By this time they reached a point where the oak openings extended from the River San Saba to Fort Mason, and at once headed for that military post. There they arrived, in a most exhausted condition, before the middle of the day.

A detachment of infantry, with five days' rations, was at once dispatched to the Comanche camp, much to the amusement of the scouts and the Tonkaway, who knew that the Indians would be aware of the approach of the soldiers, and would either defy them, ambush them, or ride away from them at their leisure.

Not one of our friends was free from wounds, but all were kindly cared for—Lorine being nursed by the wife of an officer at the fort. Soon all were fully restored.

The wagon-train being found, was escorted to the post by a detail of soldiers, on the day following.

It is almost needless to say that Colonel La Coste gave up his resolution to locate beyond the San Saba. Not only so, but he returned and settled on the Rio Guadalupe, where he lived, prosperous and happy, for many years, and proud always of his brave son-in-law, Frederick Fontaine, or Frio Fred.

Louis became a noted and daring scout, and afterward an extensive ranchero; but none of our friends ever forgot the services of the faithful Tonkaway, who was always welcome at the home of "Lily-Face," and frequently accompanied, on long scouts, Frio Fred, the happiest man in the Lone Star State, and his pard, Old Rocky.

Neither were the services, and death in their defense, of Jackson and Big Bill, forgotten.

Their remains were buried, with all the honors of war, beneath a moss-draped oak near Fort Mason. There they sleep peacefully, though the same fierce whoops of war from the Comanches have often sounded over their graves.

THE END.

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